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FRONTISPIECE. Meta Wallace.

META WALLACE,

OR

THE SEEN AND UNSEEN.

A TALE.

By AGNES D. RANDOLPH.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." — 2 Cor. iv: 17–18.

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THE SEEN AND UNSEEN.

CHAPTER I.

IN the handsome library at Bellevue, surrounded by elegant furniture and costly books, rare gems of statuary and painting, luxurious easy-chairs, and the innumerable appliances of wealth that bore witness to modern invention, stood an old, quaintly carved desk, that had been an heirloom in the family for generations. With an air of superiority, as if impressed with the fact that its sturdy frame had defied time and its ravages, while the heirs were gathered to their fathers, the venerable piece of furniture looked down on its more modern neighbors, as if defying them to stand before the sage who had lived in the world so long, and seen so many of its chances and changes under this very roof. Somewhat after the fashion of

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our grandfathers, though rather more silently, perhaps, it bore witness to the immense superiority of its own age and day, while deploring the degeneracy of ours; forgetful that had the same world remained in primitive simplicity, its very self had never been made.

The library being a forbidden apartment to the children of the household, and the pigeonholes and spindle legs of the venerable desk a source of intense wonder and curiosity to childhood, it was not surprising that the room became a great temptation to the occupants of the nursery, and its locked door the cause of many a wistful sigh. Mr. Wallace, when at Bellevue himself, sometimes invited Meta to a further acquaintance with his favorite retreat; but during the long summers, when her papa was away and the room turned over to the housekeeper — vigilant Mrs. Walker — the child was never allowed to enter, unless the door was left open by accident, and she found her way in, unsuspected.

It was on one of these occasions that Meta invaded her father's territory, and, after a look at the pictures and books, scrambled up in a chair at the old desk, seized a piece of paper lying among the scraps in one of the pigeonholes, and began to write in large characters, talking to herself earnestly as she did so.

"It's very provoking to have a doll's party all to myself," she muttered, "and Walker never will as much as taste anything. This old piece of paper isn't nice enough for Kitty Clare, she's *so* fashionable. Oh, dear! I've blotted it, too!" Here ensued a moment's silence, as she turned the oblong scrap of paper over in her hand, looking ruefully at the blot, and discovering, for the first time, that it was covered with writing on the other side, with a very plain signature in a bold, masculine hand, at the end. This difficulty was soon disposed of; for, without pausing to reflect, Meta tore the paper in half and thrust it in one of the pigeon-holes, and then, possessing herself of a fresh sheet, began scribbling again. She was so absorbed in her occupation that she was conscious of nothing but Kitty Clare and her doll's party, until the door opened suddenly, and the redoubtable Walker stood before her guilty eyes.

"O Meta, Meta! What mischief are you in now?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Walker," faltered the child, hurriedly scrambling to her feet, "indeed, I was only writing a note."

"Writing a note!" repeated the housekeeper, suspiciously; "and who were you writing to, I'd like to know?"

"Only to Kitty Clare. I wanted her, ever so much, to come to my doll's party —"

"Kitty Clare? I'll be bound you've been playing with one of those village girls, and your mamma will be blaming me, when she comes home, for letting you do it."

"But, dear Walker, Florry and all the girls are away with their mammas, and I have no one to play with. I am sure mamma won't mind Kitty, because — because —"

"Out with it," cried the housekeeper, impatiently.

"Because she's nobody at all, only a make-believe little girl I play with every day. Don't get mad, Walker, please don't! You see," confidentially, "I am *so* tired of dolls, and I just pretend to myself that Kitty lives in a beautiful house, and never does anything wrong or naughty. Isn't it fun to make believe when you get tired of playthings?"

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Walker, crossly; "don't try to make me believe such foolishness! Come along to my room until you can speak the truth. Have you been at your father's papers and books? Did you dare to touch anything in the library, along with your other naughtiness?"

Meta was silent a moment. Never having been taught the necessity of truthfulness, she

had a habit of evading disagreeable admissions, and, though naturally frank and ingenuous, thought that, so long as actual falsehood was avoided, there was no harm in telling a half truth. Now, therefore, instead of admitting that she had torn a piece of writing, she looked timidly in the housekeeper's face, and said, hesitatingly:

"Indeed, Mrs. Walker, papa keeps all his papers locked up. I was only writing to Kitty on an old piece, and it wouldn't do. I don't think —"

To Meta's infinite relief, her sentence was cut short by the sudden appearance of Bridget, the nurse and house girl, at the door.

"If ye please, mum, Mrs. Walker, the sheets is waiting, and my irons is getting cold," said the girl, beseechingly.

Mrs. Walker took the child's hand, and led her from the room, in evident displeasure. Meta, now that the possibility that she had done some mischief was suggested, grew suddenly grave; but her gravity did not last long; and when the housekeeper's room was reached, she had forgotten all about it, thinking only of Walker's anger, and not of its cause. While Bridget and the housekeeper were busy at the linen closet, she looked out of the window at a

brood of pretty yellow ducks, who were contentedly washing themselves in a muddy pool in the yard.

"And is it wool-gathering ye are?" asked Bridget's cheery voice, after a while.

"Oh, I was only thinking," replied Meta, starting out of her reverie, as the big hand was laid on her shoulder in a rough caress.

"Thinking?" echoed Bridget; "and sure, Mrs. Walker, ma'am, it's too much of the same she does. What should the likes of her have to be thinking about, sweet lamb?"

"Thinking, eh!" cried Mrs. Walker, from the pile of linen; "she'd better be thinking about her own naughty ways. And, by the way, Miss Mischief, you said awhile ago, in the library, that you'd been writing to a nobody. I don't half believe you, and I'd just like to have a little talking, instead of so many idle thoughts. I'm determined to have the truth out of you about that Kitty something or other, so you may as well make up your mind to tell me."

Mrs. Walker left her sheets in confusion, and walked over to the window, looking very stern and determined as she took Meta's round face between her hands. A world of perplexity shone in those pretty dark eyes, as it flashed over Meta's mind how difficult it would be to

explain to the practical Mrs. Walker that she really had spoken the truth, and Kitty was only an imaginary character.

"I told you," she said, half sulkily, half frightened,—"I told you she was nobody at all but a little make-believe girl. O Walker," she went on, throwing her arms about the woman, caressingly, "if you *did* know how tired I get with those dolls! I wish I had a nice little girl friend to play with me, and then I would not have to make believe. Don't get angry, Walker, please don't."

But Walker *was* angry. The poor, starved, unloved childhood had been so long the source of her daily annoyance, that she had neither patience nor wisdom to understand its longings.

"Don't think to impose on *me*," she cried, contemptuously; "I don't believe it's anything but a story. You've gone and played with some of those horrid village children, and I'll have to take the blame. The idea of a girl ten years old playing with make-believe people —"

"Arrah! Let the child say her own say, and not be judging her like that," cried Bridget's kind voice. "Don't you know, ma'am, it's the way to make her deceive you, always misdoubting her word? Sure, Meta, you didn't mean to tell an untruth, my honey, but just tell her you

didn't," said the girl, coaxingly. But Meta was not to be coaxed. She had been so often doubted that she had grown indifferent to such accusations, and felt she had no honor to vindicate. When Walker once made up her mind, nothing could move her; so generally these disputes ended in obstinate resistance on the child's part, and perplexity on the housekeeper's. Meta's face was now very red, and her hands tightly clasped, but she did not utter a sound. The child was learning self-control, at the expense of truth and uprightness.

"If you won't open your mouth, I'll soon put you where the use of your tongue will come to you," cried the housekeeper, out of patience.

Meta only shrugged her shoulders, and pouted, though visions of a dark lumber-room upstairs, which Mrs. Walker kept for purposes of discipline, made her inwardly quail. The housekeeper, at heart, was a good woman, but she possessed a most irritable temper; and the unlimited control accorded her, during Mrs. Wallace's summer tours, made her often unjust. She had been in the family during her own girlhood, had imbibed its prejudices, and did very much as she pleased with the whole establishment. Being of unblemished honesty, and very capable, Mrs. Wallace never questioned her

ability to govern, and so Meta's youthful impressions were left to very questionable guidance. Bridget's heart, overflowing with kindly sympathy, had long since accorded a loving tenderness to the neglected child, and her independent partisanship had averted many a storm in the nursery, where Florry tyrannized and Edward teased. In the servants' department she always interposed her brawny arms between poor Meta and harm; so a warm friendship had sprung up between them, and in Meta's eyes there was no sweeter, kindlier face than the plain, good-natured features of her Irish nurse. So now, when Mrs. Walker's wrath boiled over, and the big key of the lumber-room was drawn forth from the basket, to be put into immediate use, Bridget laid an entreating hand on the woman's arm, as she cried, earnestly:

"Sure, ma'am, *I* understand the child. She didn't mean to deceive you, but she's been deceiving herself."

"Deceiving herself? What *can* possess you, Bridget? You think Meta always in the right. It is really absurd, the way you spoil the child."

"Nay, nay, ma'am," cried Bridget, with a flushed face; "sure, an' I only wants justice done. I did the same at her age, and was never doubted the truth, neither. Oh, I remember me

the make-believe people as I played with oft and over, in the old field beyont my mother's house in the dear auld counthry. O ma'am, let the poor child alone with her friends!"

The tender Irish heart was overflowing with recollections of home, as Bridget wiped away the moisture in her honest blue eyes with a corner of her clean starched apron.

Mrs. Walker, with a sudden resolution, threw the key of the lumber-room back in her basket, and left the room, shutting the door with a bang.

In a moment Meta was in Bridget's lap, hugging the fat neck with her pretty bare arms, kissing and patting the homely face of her homely friend.

"Don't cry, Bridget," she sobbed out; "oh, you dear old good Bridget, don't cry." But her childish sympathy only brought the tears faster.

"Oh, the dear days that are gone from me!" sobbed the girl, her face buried in the apron; "the father, the mother, the cottage, and all my friends, and all my plays gone from me, and only Johnny and poverty left."

Meta sat in an awestruck silence as Bridget's broken sentences were sobbed out. Child as she was, the sight of true grief banished her own little cares, and roused the quick sympathy

of her tender heart. That Bridget, her own true friend, whose cheerful voice always roused her from her own perplexities, should have a trouble of her own, opened a new phase of life to her wondering eyes. Were there greater trials in the big world than the loneliness of a dwarfed child-life, and the stinging sense of daily, hourly injustice? Were Mrs. Walker's stern sentence, and papa's coldness, and mamma's absorption only a part of the great lesson of sorrow to be learned?

It seemed to Meta as if a shadow had drifted over the sun, since Bridget, too, could cry. That blithe, cheerful countenance was unlike itself in tears; yet, though longing to console in her small way, she refrained, with instinctive delicacy, from saying aught until the girl had regained composure, and smiled in her face; and then self-control was lost in a passion of tears on the broad shoulder of her friend.

It was thus Mrs. Walker found them a few minutes later; and, mentally styling Bridget a "silly goose," she sent her to another part of the house, and prepared to hear Meta's defense of her imaginary friends. Bridget's sorrow had completely overcome the child's obstinacy, and she volunteered the information Mrs. Walker waited for. Vague guesses of the cause of her

nurse's tears, and of who "Johnny" could be, had entirely absorbed her attention; and though she listened respectfully to Mrs. Walker's lecture on truthfulness, very little of it really entered her brain. When threatened with a letter to mamma if Kitty Clare turned out to be a flesh-and-blood village girl, instead of a myth, she had dutifully answered, "Yes, ma'am," and then joyfully accepted permission to follow Bridget to the laundry.

As she closed the door after her, she paused a moment in the passage; and, hearing Bridget's cheerful voice warbling the plaintive melody, "Begone, dull care," Meta, with true childish forgetfulness of trouble, ran off merrily to seek her friend.

CHAPTER II.

THE wondering brown eyes of our little friend had opened on this busy life in a beautiful apartment of a grand house in New York. Silken curtains shut out rude sounds from her baby ears, and delicate laces lay cunningly around the little face; yet Meta cried like other wee babies, and took just as strange, wondering observation of surrounding objects, with her blinking baby eyes, as the rest of the human family. Wealth could not take away the aches and ills of babyhood; nor could her catnip and pap, served in a gold-lined cup, by the most dignified of nurses, still the determined exercise of her baby lungs. She went through the infinite variety of infant tortures, from being dosed with sedatives when she was cross, down to violent shakings when she would fain

have slept, just as though she were not the child of a household whose every wish was gratified.

The Wallaces of Bellevue, on the Hudson, were an old family, in which wealth had been handed down from one generation to another; and, at the time of which we write, Edward Wallace stood in the foremost rank of the millionaires of his native State.

They were a proud race, and had so long "flourished like a green bay tree" in the garden of earthly prosperity, that they felt an unconscious security against misfortune, and read of the fate of those whose confidence was placed in the multitude of riches as if they themselves were set apart as too exclusive to be reached by the adverse winds that made shipwreck of so many human hopes. Mr. Wallace had retired from business for some years, and spent most of his time at Bellevue during the winter, though the family regularly went to town at that season. Even here, surrounded by books of all nations and people, he kept up the old routine of thought. The accumulation of money had so long absorbed every faculty of his being, that even his luxurious surroundings could not rouse his mind from the treadmill it had gone over so diligently for years; and he

still regulated his cheerfulness of spirit by the fall or rise in gold. He did not come of a godless race, for there had been Wallaces who had suffered and died for the faith; but the "deceitfulness of riches" and "the pride of life" had choked the Word in his heart, and favored the growth of such noxious weeds as needed a strong Hand to uproot.

Mrs. Wallace was a fair, beautiful woman, in the prime of life. At once the leader and the envy of fashionable friends, she was, like her husband, building a palace for her soul in which to "eat, drink, and be merry," stifling all ennobling desires in a perpetual round of gayety, and, despite her wealth and her power, living a life of absolute slavery to the world — that false

> — world, with encroachments that chafe and perplex,
> With its men against men, and its sex against sex.

That other world — the great sorrowing heart of human nature, throbbing out its woes in the din of a great city — was outside the narrow boundary of her exclusive set, and she neither believed, nor cared to vindicate, its wrongs. Was it not enough that she scrupulously headed subscription lists with a sum beyond the reach of her neighbors? that she patronized fairs and bazars, and even condescended to look

pretty and bewitching behind the stalls thereof? that she regularly entered her cushioned pew in a white marble edifice, where low chantings, and robed boys, and dim lights were artistic aids to devotion? If there were suffering women and little barefooted children, with starved bodies and souls, within a stone's throw of her beautiful residence, didn't she pay sober women, who liked ministering to "that sort of people," to go and visit them by proxy? Why should *her* dainty skirts sweep through the garbage, over dirty thresholds, to rooms whose very odor made her faint?

All very useless would it be, dear children, if we could only look forward to shifting our judgment to come on some sober person who liked "this sort of thing." But inasmuch as "if we do unto the least of these," we have done unto Christ himself, it is easy to see that the blessing cannot come by proxy, any more than deeds of mercy can be entirely paid for, though it is our own money that heads the list. That discipline to *our* hearts, and that comfort to sorrowing humanity, which deeds of charity in person alone can bring, is not to be wrung out of a subscription-list to instruct the heathen. If we would know how men and women, and even tender children, of like feelings with us, go through

the days and nights of sorrow and pain and starvation, we must learn the lesson for ourselves; ours must be the lips to cheer with words of sympathy, ours the hands to hold the cup of cold water to burning lips, else we have only half accomplished the injunction laid upon us by One whose care was not for the rich and mighty, but for the sinful and sorrowing among men.

The husband and wife were too much absorbed in their separate interests to give themselves up to a home life. Everything in the stately house was conducted in admirable taste and regularity; but there was no one room, in all the luxurious building, where that indescribable air of sympathy, and love, and tenderness prevailed, which is such a blessed gift to most of us in our homes. The grand nursery, where hirelings performed the sweet offices that form the joy and pride of motherhood, was *too* grand to be comfortable. Children's voices were tuned to a low key by discipline, and the elegant toys and furniture were only to be looked at. Mrs. Wallace paid a visit, two or three times a week, to the children's department, and on such occasions allowed them to play with her watch, or tell their grievances; but the visit was hardly a pleasure to her.

Edward, Florence, and Meta were the only survivors of six beautiful children. Wealth had no power to stay the hand of the Destroyer, for

> Death comes down with reckless footstep
> To the hall and hut.

But, though the light of sweet eyes went out in darkness, and the mother folded little waxen fingers in a last clasp over the muslin drapery, no lesson came home to the heart wrapped up in so many worldly cares. The house was closed, and the gayety ceased, for a season; but, further than this, Mrs. Wallace gave no greater evidence of her losses than the expensive half-mourning that had replaced her more gaudy surroundings.

The little ones who were spared to her were left to struggle feebly upward to the light; those who, at the splendid christenings, had forsworn, in their names, "the world, the flesh, and the devil," were in bondage themselves to the same.

At the time we write of, Edward, the eldest, was sixteen, and pretty much beyond the control of either parent. He spent an ample allowance, while pretending to go through a course of study at Yale, and had already occasioned his father considerable uneasiness lest

his energies as a man should be wasted in riotous living.

Florence, three years younger, was already a miniature woman, who, promoted from the thraldom of the nursery, entertained her mother's visitors, and was regularly taken to the summer resorts with her parents. Her lively manners, witty conversation, and beautiful face, made her the spoiled darling of the mother's heart, and the pet of the fashionable coterie in which they moved.

Meta, being only ten, and a shy, queer little girl, always in disgrace, was still under the dominion of nursery government; and, while her mamma and Florry drank in the exhilarating ocean air, she was left all through the long, hot summers at Bellevue, under Mrs. Walker's charge.

On the whole, she liked the summers best. She was too natural and free to learn Florry's worldliness, and was always committing some *gaucherie* in the drawing-room which brought her in disgrace. City life stifled her; for she hated to be dressed, and have her hair curled, nor could she endure French maids. In the country all was congenial. Nature's sights and sounds were an untold delight to her child-heart. She loved to wade in the brook, feed the chick-

ens, when Mrs. Walker was in a good humor, and to go with Bridget to the lot where Catherine milked the cows. A draught of the warm, sweet milk was far more delicious to her uncultivated palate than the wine at her father's table, just because it was never so warm and sweet in New York. Bridget had not been long in Mrs. Wallace's service, and Meta had gone through divers rough hands before she became the charge of the good Irishwoman. So, by very force of contrast, a warm friendship had sprung up between them at once; and the summer at Bellevue, of which we write, brought with it many pleasures, notwithstanding Meta's occasional disgrace.

CHAPTER III.

IS it you, darlint?" asked Bridget's cheery voice, as Meta opened the laundry door.

"Yes, and I have come to have a nice talk with you," she answered, approaching the table where Bridget's muslin ruffles were assuming elegant shapes in her deft fingers. Resting her round face on her hands, the child looked on earnestly and admiringly at the progress of Bridget's work, and plied so many questions, on various subjects, that the busy woman found it hard to answer.

"Nay, Meta, be quiet against I finish the dress," she remonstrated, "and then we'll go for a look at the cows while Catherine milks."

Meta with difficulty ceased talking, but her patience was not long tried. Bridget's swift

hands had soon finished the ironing, and the two were at liberty to seek the favorite resort —the lot where Catherine reigned over the milk-pail.

As they took the little worn path across the fields, Meta's tongue went as busily as ever.

"Isn't it funny, Bridget, that you played with make-believe people, just like me?"

"Yes, Meta, I was a queer body of a child, and my mother had no bairn then but me. Johnny is ten years younger nor I; and when he was a baby yet, I was helpin' in the cottage, and not thinking of dolls nor fairies."

"Fairies, Bridget? Why, mamma says there are no such people, and all those stories are untrue!"

"So they be, so they be, darlint! Only in the auld counthry the folks say that once in the world the fairies *did* live, and their pots of stone could be found on the beach by the sea."

"But they couldn't, could they, Bridget?"

"Nay, Meta, I fear me not! Many's the day I loitered with my basket of peat to look for a fairy pot, but I never found one. I used to wish they did live, when Johnny's back was so bad, and the doctors had no comfort for my mother."

The girl, overcome by recollections of home, was crying again, softly.

Meta, forgetting that she had come out to see the cows, suddenly pulled Bridget down on a large flat stone in their path, and sat down at her feet, looking up in the tearful face.

"Tell me all about it, now," she said, taking the rough hand in hers; "and don't cry, Bridget, or I will cry, too."

There was a quiver about the lips as she ceased, and the woman, observing it, told her story without further urging, after laying the curly head in her lap, and tenderly smoothing the child's brow. It was a very old story of sickness and poverty, but it was new to the wondering listener. Reared in luxury, she knew nothing of the countless number of human beings who perish for lack of the food and raiment she had received as a matter of course. Bridget had come from the North of Ireland, where her father had received as his birthright the legacy of Protestant faith, and poverty. He had been a day-laborer in a flourishing mill, and, by great industry and economy, had managed to support his family in their frugal wants; but a fatal day came, when a misstep, a loss of balance, a sudden blurring, blinding mist before his eyes, and he was caught in the machinery. A poor, mangled, lifeless mass was all that remained of humanity when assistance reached him.

The feeble, invalid wife never recovered the shock, and in a few months Bridget was sole guardian of Johnny — the young brother, deformed and suffering from his birth. There were many sympathizing hearts and ready hands among their poor neighbors, but the struggle for subsistence was too great for them to give vent to the generous promptings that filled those humble hearts. The only relative of the orphans was an uncle, rather well-to-do, in America, who offered to support Johnny, and help find employment for his niece, if they would try the New World; and so, despite their heavy grief, Bridget, looking upon America as the land of promise and of rest, was buoyed up with hope, and left her old home to seek her fortune across the water. For six years all went well. She made kind friends in the West, where she left Johnny on his uncle's farm, and still kinder friends in New York, where she worked for herself. But during the spring of that year her troubles began. The uncle died suddenly, leaving his large family very much straitened; and Bridget's pride rebelled against leaving her invalid brother a burden on the widow. Just before entering Mrs. Wallace's service she had succeeded in exciting the interest of a benevolent physician, in whose family

she had once lived, in Johnny's case; and through his kindness and liberality secured a place for the boy in one of the city hospitals, where he had been comfortably installed just before she had moved to Bellevue for the summer. The poor woman had begun her story in a voice choked with sobs, but by degrees she had grown calmer; and when she reached the recital of Johnny's life in the hospital, she even smiled.

"O darlint!" she cried, earnestly, "he is such a lovely child! The poor body is often turning and writhing with pain, but the big blue eyes shine like stars when I go to see him, and he smiles so peaceful like, and tells me he's learning how."

"Learning how? Why, what can he mean by that?"

"Oh, then, I must tell you in his own beautiful words, Meta. He says he has the loveliest dreams about angels, and crowns, and shining white robes, and that he's learning the way to that far-off country where he will throw away his vile body to be washed clean in the blood of the Lamb."

"What *can* he mean?" asked Meta, in an awed voice; "does he mean he is going to heaven?"

"He means he is learning the way," replied the sister, with happy confidence. "He says when the pains take him he thinks of the blessed Lord that suffered for him, and he prays for strength not to get tired with the bearing it. When we go back to New York, I will ask your mamma to let you go with me to the hospital. Sure, it's a sight to see; the poor wasted body, and the great soul of him looking out at the eyes."

"What's the matter with him that makes his body so funny, Bridget?"

"The spine, Meta; all crooked, and full of pain —"

"Why didn't you tell me about him long ago? He might have had my oranges and cakes, you know; and I could have gone with you ever so often —"

"I fear me your mamma will not like it, now," said Bridget, doubtfully; "and you remember, in the city, darlint, you was always with the Frenchwoman; and then Johnny only came before we left, a pace."

"Mamma is not going to care a bit; I'll ask her. I went to all sorts of places with Rosalie, and she never said a word about it. But, Bridget, who told your brother to be so good?"

"Arrah, don't be asking such-like questions,

Meta. Wasn't it my blessed uncle and his poor widow as helped him to find comfort? And then there's good Mrs. Hale, as acts a mother's part by my poor boy. She is the nurse that belongs to his ward; and a good Christian woman she is, God bless the likes of her in the land!"

"Did she beg him not to cry when his back ached, and talk to him about the white robes, and the angels?"

"Well! and we'll say she did; but it was God's spirit working in her. And praise God do I, on my bended knees, each night, for raising up a motherly friend for my Johnny. Ah, I doubt not her counsels is good."

"But then, you see, Bridget, *telling* people to bear pain, and not cry, don't *make* them do it. When I had the measles I wasn't much sick, but I cried a good deal; you see, I felt so cross, and Rosalie was so mean. Mamma said I was a fretful, naughty child. Did Johnny ever have the measles? or is that pain in the back not such a cross one?"

"Bless me, child, it's a deal worse! Just suppose you could never run about, or even sit up, some days, and your shoulders all crooked—"

"Bridget, darling," interrupted a frightened voice, "couldn't you tell me the way? *I* want

to be good, like Johnny, but I don't know how. Couldn't *I* dream about angels and crowns, too, if I tried?"

"Nay, Meta; if you want to be like my Johnny, you must never do anything wrong —"

"But how can I, if I don't know how?"

"Oh, it's try you must! Never do you fly in a passion with Mrs. Walker, as a beginning, darlint; and when we go to New York, sure it's ask Johnny we will, and I doubt but he'll tell you better nor me. But let's be off to the house. Catherine is home by this, and we'll come in for a wee bit scolding if we are late for tea."

Meta had no time for further questioning, as the faint tinkling of a far-off bell warned Bridget that Mrs. Walker was awaiting them; so she hurried her steps to keep up with the nurse. There was a newly-learned gravity on the childish face as they walked to the house, and she was very silent. She was thinking of the poor, helpless boy, and his dreams about angels; and, instinctively, her eyes turned to the little, twinkling summer stars coming out in the sky. Wondering thoughts of heaven, and the little brothers and sister she had seen in death, came through her mind. She had been told, in answer to her eager questions, that the little ones

were in heaven; but heaven seemed far off, and filled her with awe and fear. Now a new phase of spiritual life was presented to her, and she learned, for the first time, that the better land, about which her ideas were so vague and uncomfortable, was really a home to be yearned for — a hope of entering its joys sufficient to soothe the pains of mortality.

Surely God's Holy Spirit was watching tenderly over her young soul, fostering the feeble germ of new life, that brought so deep a yearning for the knowledge of good and evil that would enable her to guide her steps to the gates of the Golden City. She pondered Bridget's story in her heart, with an intense desire to be good enough to be folded in the loving arms of the Saviour, whose tenderness for little children had only been imperfectly understood. It did not seem strange to Meta that men and women should be good and brave; that, she thought, came with growth and years. But that a mere boy should be taught, in sickness and pain, so to stifle his natural weakness as to find comfort in affliction, was a question of deep and mysterious significance to her mind. Shadows of her future struggles with self may have drifted across her child-life when she found her rebellious spirit so difficult to quell, but this was all.

The fact that she must die was one seldom presented for her thoughts. She had never been told that the rich man's wealth "cometh up like a flower, and is cut down," nor that human life "fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not." Her tender conscience, with its impulse to good and its warfare with evil, was left without guidance from those who should have helped the wavering desires; yet Meta was not alone. There is One who leaveth the ninety-nine in the wilderness to seek the one lost sheep; who numbers the very hairs of our heads; and, when father and mother forsake, takes us under the shadow of his wing. And though this promise is seldom realized, inasmuch as parental love more often maketh idols of its own, yet there are times when the soul starves, while the body is delicately nurtured; and then it is that there is stretched forth to shield us from destruction that Hand, "mighty to save" the vessels appointed unto honor. Meta had one Friend whose power held the universe in the hollow of his hand. Surely she was not left comfortless.

CHAPTER IV.

THE day following her walk with Bridget was one of great perplexity to Meta. Very disagreeable visions of that paper torn in half and thrust into the empty pigeon-hole of her father's desk flitted through her brain. She was not used to take her mischievous escapades so seriously to heart; but Johnny's wonderful story had set her to thinking, and had aroused fears of her last piece of naughtiness, which she had forgotten in the excitement of her walk. After a few hours' uncomfortable reflection, she resolved upon taking a second look at the paper, to see if there was any reason why she should be so worried about the matter. It had always been a sure cause of punishment for the children to go into the library at all, and Meta's state of mind was not

improved by the reflection that she was committing still another fault by entering the forbidden apartment again; but her anxiety gave her little time for thought, and it was with something like desperation that she took the library key from the basket when chance put it in her way. Mrs. Walker was out-of-doors somewhere, Bridget busy up-stairs, and there was no one to interfere with her movements; yet Meta felt very guilty as she ran along the passage, noiselessly opened the door as quickly as trembling fingers would admit, and was soon inside, with the door securely locked. Once safely in the dim-lighted room, she drew a sigh of relief, and hastily scrambled upon the desk, rummaged in the pigeon-hole for the scraps, and drew forth the torn paper. It had lain in a pool of ink, and was so blotted and blurred that, even after piecing it, Meta found it unintelligible, except a name at the bottom, "Joseph Ascher." Still gazing at the blots, in perplexity, she was roused by a sudden and violent knocking at the door, as Mrs. Walker's voice reached her guilty ears, in angry orders to let her in at once. Meta had entirely forgotten a window opening on the piazza, at which Mrs. Walker had been standing, and had witnessed her entire proceedings in the library. Not

daring to disobey the housekeeper's command, yet not being entirely satisfied that it was best to confess, Meta rolled the torn paper in as small a compass as possible; and, thrusting it into her mouth, took courage to unlock the door, with a sinking heart. Mrs. Walker viewed the culprit angrily.

"This comes of not punishing you yesterday," she said, severely. "Now tell me just what you have been doing at that desk, and don't think to put me off with any nonsense about your Kittys, and foolishness. Out with it, miss."

But Meta did not — indeed she could not — answer. Her mouth was so stuffed with paper that a reply would have been impossible without betraying herself; and she resolutely shut her teeth firmly on the piece, and kept silent, thereby adding to Mrs. Walker's wrath.

"Obstinate thing!" she said, angrily, catching the child's chin in no tender hand; "tell me, this instant, or I'll put you in the garret for the rest of this blessed day."

Meta inwardly winced, but she gave no sign of being moved; and even when Bridget was summoned to exorcise the dumb spirit, she met the sad, reproachful eyes of her favorite without quailing. Mrs. Walker having tried her powers

of restoring the gift of speech, and the nurse her utmost persuasions, Meta was unceremoniously lifted in the Irishwoman's sturdy arms, and carried to the housekeeper's room as a hopeless case for the present. As the good-natured woman went down the passage with her burden, a peculiar sound in Meta's throat arrested her steps.

"It's choking she is, I believe, ma'am."

But no, Meta was not choking. She was chewing, with all the sharpness of her young teeth, on the thin paper, now reduced to a pulpy mass; and when Mrs. Walker's room was reached, she had resolved an end to her dilemma by swallowing the whole.

"You've got something in your mouth, you naughty girl!" cried the puzzled housekeeper.

Meta shook her head resolutely, but Bridget looked sorrowfully incredulous.

"Oh," thought Meta, beginning to cry, "she doesn't know I swallowed it! This isn't being a bit like Johnny, and Bridget thinks I've told a story."

Bridget, observing the tears in her favorite's eyes, braved Mrs. Walker's anger, and drew the sunny head, "running over with curls," to her breast, while the housekeeper, thoroughly tired of the child's obstinate temper, left the room in disgust.

"You think I told Walker a story, I know you do," cried Meta, anxiously.

Bridget nodded her head sadly.

"Indeed, indeed, I didn't!" sobbed the child, brokenly. "I did have something in my mouth, but when she asked me I had swallowed it. O do, please, believe me!"

"Swallowed it? Is it daft ye are, child?"

"No, I am not daft," sobbing violently; "I was so frightened, and Walker looked *so* cross! Oh, what shall I do? Johnny will never love poor me."

Leaning back in the nurse's arms, Meta indulged in an hysterical passion of tears; but though Bridget tried argument and entreaty, she could not be prevailed on to tell what it was she had swallowed, nor why she was so frightened.

Meta's heart was so wholly undisciplined that she fancied, by destroying all trace of her accidental piece of careless mischief, she would remedy the mischief itself; but her reasoning was very shallow — no right thing can come of two wrongs.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. WALKER'S resolution to force a confession of the mysterious naughtiness from Meta was never carried into effect. The day after the scene, while her charge was still in disgrace, a letter was received from Mrs. Wallace, announcing their return within a few days, and containing directions for the Bellevue household to hold themselves in readiness to return to the city as soon as possible after the arrival of the party from Long Branch. In the bustle that ensued, all thought of present punishment was lost sight of, and Meta was released from custody in the housekeeper's room, as both Mrs. Walker and Bridget were extremely busy.

A few days after Mrs. Wallace's letter, the travelers returned. When the carriage drew

up before the door, Meta rushed out to greet her mamma with her usual impetuosity; but Mrs. Wallace was tired and fretful, having lost a package on the cars, through her maid's carelessness; and her little daughter's vehement embraces were not very cordially received.

"You are as wild as a gypsy," said the mother, fretfully, as she kissed her rosy cheek; "and just as brown as a berry, I declare! There, child, don't tumble my dress out of all shape! Run along with Florry, and try to curb your wild spirits. I protest, Mr. Wallace," turning to her husband, "this child has the most unaccountably plebeian manners. I shall have to turn her over to Félicie, when we get back to the city. I can't conceive from whom she inherits her lack of style — certainly not from *me!*"

"Humph!" said Mr. Wallace. He seldom said more on such occasions.

"How do you do, Félicie?" said Meta, turning off, subdued out of her warmth, and addressing the French maid, who condescendingly held out her hand. The child was abashed and crestfallen; but the sight of Florry, emerging from a pile of shawls, satchels, and books on the carriage-seat, made her forget her mamma's rebukes. There was no thought of "style"

as she rushed at her sister, and bestowed on that elegant young creature a profound hug of delight.

Florry was indeed a lovely sight as she extricated herself and her flounces from Meta's arms. Her cheeks, slightly flushed from traveling, and her beautiful eyes, lighted up with something like pleasure at the prospect of telling the wonders of her summer tour to a little ignoramus, made the usually too languid face very bewitching. She was not guilty of unfashionable emotion as she held out the tips of her fingers to be assisted up the steps by the eager little sister. Florry was fully alive to the dignity of having been to several summer resorts, while Meta had spent her time with the cows and poultry of Bellevue; yet she was glad, after all, to be at home; for, though Mrs. Wallace took little notice of the fact, her beautiful daughter was not over-strong, and the exquisite coloring of her pretty cheek boded no good. Riding in the cars always tired Florry; and running, like other children of her age, made her short-breathed; yet the delicate frame was seldom allowed to rest.

"Oh, you darling old Florry!" cried Meta, impulsively; "you are beautifuller than ever!"

Florence smiled complacently, and conde-

scended to dismount from the very "high horse" she was riding. Bellevue was nothing but home and "country," and there was no necessity of being civilly cool to Meta, for she did not comprehend such airs. Besides, Florry dearly loved to talk; and unless she accepted her sister as auditor of the wonders she had seen, she must needs exercise great self-control, and keep her news for the city girls. To keep silence was a physical impossibility to Florence at all times; and besides, Meta's familiarity was infectious and irresistible; so the two girls were soon sitting at the nursery fire, chatting very merrily, while Bridget busied herself in putting aside Florry's wrappings, under that young lady's directions.

"Well, Meta," said Florry, after a pause, patting her sister's curly head, patronizingly, "there isn't a particle of use in trying to tell you all the delightful things I saw, for you couldn't begin to understand—"

"Oh, just try me, Florry, dear; I think I could, if you would only try me!"

"The idea of your knowing anything about *tableaux vivants!*" said Florry, giving the pronunciation of her mamma's maid.

"I *don't* know exactly what they mean," sighed Meta, dubiously; "but I know I could

understand if you would only try me, dear old Florry. Is it a dress, or some kind of candy, sister?"

"Much good it does you to learn French," said Florence, contemptuously; "why, you little goose, it's just like the theater, only you never went there."

"Just spell it, Florry; you know I can't pronounce like you do," pleaded Meta.

And so Florry spelled the word, loftily, and her little sister said "Oh!" in a relieved voice; and the difficult matter being satisfactorily settled, the description of the wonderful *tableaux* went on.

"Just think, child, of my standing for *five* whole minutes on one foot; and I didn't move a muscle, either," cried Florence, triumphantly.

"It must have been awfully tiresome," said the practical Meta, drawing a long breath.

"So it was; but that was the beauty of it, you see. I heard Mrs. Clarendon tell mamma that I showed great presence of mind when one of the candles fell at my feet, and I did not stir."

"Presence of mind?" asked Bridget, who had been listening; "sure, then, I think it showed the absence of it, my deary, for you to stand on one leg to be stared at like that."

"I wonder what *you* know about *tableaux!* said Florry, scornfully.

"Oh, plenty, plenty," cried Bridget, tossing her head.

Florence was no favorite of hers; and, being always pert to the servants, often exposed herself to the ready Irish wit, which she found it hard to match. But Meta was too eager to hear more to suffer the dispute to go on; and she successfully interfered, drawing out all Florry had to relate, and spending such a delightful evening that she gave no thought to the fact of her recent disgrace and trouble.

The few days of their stay at Bellevue passed very swiftly. Florence was extremely agreeable, and even took pleasure in Meta's country walks; though she refused to take a farewell view of the cows, and Meta was forced to make her adieux with Bridget. Mrs. Walker was too much engaged to report the little girl's naughtiness, and Mrs. Wallace was so unusually genial and affectionate that her charge never gave the matter a thought. Mrs. Wallace, finding the supposed missing package was among the numerous wraps, and had been only left at the station, recovered her good humor, and talked over with Florry the many pleasant scenes of the past summer, much to the delight of the

little one who had been left to Mrs. Walker's tender mercies so long. It was scarcely a wonder that, under such circumstances, her yearnings to learn Johnny's secret of happiness, and the undefined desires to be good, should have faded into the background. I doubt if poor Meta would have thought about Johnny at all, during those few days, but for a desire to show Florry that, if she had been at home all summer, she had something more wonderful than even *tableaux* to talk about. But she did not find the subject very interesting to her sister when she broached it on the cars.

"Angels, and crooked backs, and small-pox hospitals, indeed!" cried Florry, elevating her nose. "Do you really flatter yourself mamma is ever going to let you cultivate all the paupers in town?"

"But, Florry, he knows a heap more than either of us, and he is so good. Then you know, sis, he is Bridget's brother; and I believe he could tell you about all sorts of beautiful things you never saw. Do you hear what I say?"

Meta was screaming it out in order that Florry's ears might be reached above the din of the cars; and as the train reached a station before her sentence was concluded, she was

considerably abashed to hear her own voice raised to such a pitch, and to observe the smiling faces of those in her vicinity, who had been amused at her earnestness.

"See what you've done, now," said Florry, contemptuously; while her mamma, with an aristocratic horror of seeing anything belonging to her the subject of jest, called Meta over to Bridget's seat, and so the discussion ended.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHORT time after the family were comfortably settled in Thirty-fifth street, Meta rushed into her mother's dressing-room, one sunny afternoon, in a state of intense excitement. Mrs. Wallace and Florry were dressed for a ride in the Park, and were only awaiting a few last touches from Félicie to start.

"Mamma, mamma, may I go with Bridget to see Johnny?" was the child's eager greeting; "she says she has time, and we will be sure to get back for tea in Mrs. Walker's room. Oh, do say yes!"

The bright, earnest face, glowing with anticipated pleasure, smote the mother's heart strangely; and she made room for the child on her lounge, looking kindly into her beaming

eyes, and smoothing the rings of shining hair on the white brow.

"And who is Johnny, first, my little girl," she asked, with interest.

"Only Bridget's little sick brother," she answered, eagerly; "a poor little boy, that can't straighten his back, and dreams about angels, and never cries —"

"Not so fast, Meta. Tell me first where your paragon lives, before you describe his perfections. Not in a dirty alley, I hope, where you'll go and catch some dreadful disease?"

"Why, no, mamma; it's in a nice, clean hospital, where a good nurse takes care of him; and Bridget says —"

"Bridget has no business to be filling your head with such ideas. Don't you know that people have small-pox, and cholera, and all sorts of things in those nice, clean hospitals?"

"You see, Meta," interposed Florry, benignly, as she fastened her glove, "I told you mamma would object. Fancy Bridget's brother, mamma, knowing the most wonderful things about angels, and teaching people to get straight to heaven. Wasn't that what you said, Meta? Or was it only crooked backs —"

Florry had not been so cruel since her return; and Meta, disappointed and angry, burst into tears in the midst of her sister's sentence.

"Go and tell Bridget I wish to speak to her, Félicie," said Mrs. Wallace, rather provoked with both of the girls. "Dry your eyes, Meta, and try not to be such a baby. And do you, Florence, recollect that your sister is not to be maliciously teased."

Florry looked up in amazement, saying, "Really, mamma!" with the air of an empress; and Meta actually ceased crying, to seek in her mother's face some explanation of her unwonted judgment against the spoiled darling of the house. But Mrs. Wallace was gazing absently at the fire, and said nothing more, nor was there anything to be read in her abstracted countenance; yet the mother *was* thinking, more moved than she cared to admit to herself, by an indescribable reproach she had fancied in her child's earnest face.

Bridget's entrance roused the party. Mrs. Wallace diligently cross-questioned the nurse, but found nothing reprehensible in the simple story of sickness and want that was told in a few words. After a moment's reflection she gave the permission that Meta longed to hear, and, merely cautioning Bridget not to instruct the little girl in Methodistical views, she dismissed them.

"Remember that I shall hold you accounta-

ble for any further eccentricity in Meta," she said, severely; "the child is puzzling enough now, and I don't wish her peculiarities fostered. And now go. Take this money," slipping in Bridget's hand two pieces of silver, "and buy some oranges and candy for the sick boy. I dare say he will enjoy them."

Meta and Bridget poured forth rapturous thanks as they left the dressing-room, and, after a hasty toilet, hurried to a favorite confectioner's, where the dollar was soon laid out in a tempting parcel of fruit and sweets. Bridget was more tender than wise.

On the way down the avenue Meta stopped to listen to the strains of a hand-organ, whose owner was grinding away at the instrument, casting appealing looks at the passers-by; but no one gave heed to his music. A miserable little girl, holding out a tambourine in a pair of very dirty hands, and a queer little monkey, winking his eyes, and hopping about in a red-flannel suit, completed the scene.

Bridget would have instantly hailed a street-car, for she distrusted all "Italianers," as she called them, and had often paid the organ men to remove their cracked instruments from Mrs. Wallace's door; but Meta was struck with the poor little face, so old beyond its years, and

looked pityingly at the bare feet and scanty covering.

"Please, dear Bridget, stop one minute! Let me see if I haven't a penny!" And she hastily stuck her fat, gloved hand in the pretty white muff. But, no, the silver *porte-monnaie* was at home; and her face grew very long.

"Oh," she said, sighing dolefully, "what shall I do? My money is every bit at home."

"Do? Why, come along with me to see Johnny. We've missed two cars already, along of standing here with them dirty Italianers. Don't I know them all? Besides, your purse isn't so very full. Don't you know you spent all this month's allowance for the big doll at Agneau's?"

Bridget was impatient at delay, and was not disposed to assist Meta's benevolence.

"No, Bridget," said the child, slowly, "I haven't bought the doll yet, though I did want to ever so much. It is mighty pretty —"

"Please, little lady, just a penny," interrupted the tambourine girl, comprehending the scene; "just a penny for my little sick brother."

The words "sick brother" softened Bridget's heart.

"I haven't any change with me," she said, regretfully, after giving the girl a keen look of scrutiny; "I wish I had —".

"Come to-morrow to No. — East Thirty-fifth street," said Meta, glibly, as she seized an orange from the bundle she carried, and threw it into the tambourine; "I've got a lot of six-pences in my purse —"

Here Bridget broke up the parley by vigorously shaking her parasol at a passing car driver, and hurried the child away. She did not say anything for some time after they were seated in the car, and Meta looked up timidly in her face.

"You're not mad, dear old Bridget?"

"No; only uneasy-like in my mind. What will your mamma say to the likes of this?"

"Why, the money is mine, and mamma gives it to me to do with just as I please. I do want to give that poor little girl some of it, Bridget. Did you see her bare feet and ragged dress?"

"But what becomes of the big doll?"

"Oh, I can do without it this month," said Meta, with a steady voice, though her countenance fell. She had taken a daily walk to Agneau's ever since their return to town, in order to feast her eyes on the wonderful young lady; for though she protested she was tired of such playthings, she constantly added to her stock, and possessed a large number of dolls, of divers

shapes and sizes, in various stages of mutilation.

"Oh, if that's where you are," laughed Bridget, "if you really can do without your big baby, why, I don't suppose your mamma cares. But we'll see what we will see."

Now this was a favorite expression of Bridget's, and one with which she always managed to convey a sarcasm. Meta particularly objected to having it applied to her, and was therefore silent for the rest of the ride; especially so, when on reflection she began to suspect that her *porte-monnaie* was not so full as she supposed. An indistinct vision of treating Florry to a *charlotte russe* just the day before, came before her mind as she mentally counted her money, and it was a very sober little face that looked out from the stylish bonnet as they got out of the cars.

CHAPTER VII.

THE hospital was a large, handsome building, very pleasant and clean. Meta followed Bridget up the long flights of stairs, through narrow passages, to the pleasant chamber of good Mrs. Hale, where Johnny generally sat in his invalid chair, when not too feeble to be moved. The boy looked so bright and happy, as he read by the cheerful fire, that Meta could not believe he was sick, until she saw how thin and transparent was the hand laid in her chubby fingers when Bridget presented her to Johnny. The brother and sister laughed and chatted eagerly, and opened the bundles of good things; but Meta could not talk. The scene was altogether a puzzle to her; it was strange, she thought, to see a boy who dreamed about angels, and knew the way to

heaven, eating candy and oranges with great apparent relish, and talking gayly of every-day things. She had expected to find a very grave, sad personage in Johnny; and his smiling face overthrew all her ideas of one who was not afraid to die, nor to suffer. Her silence was so unusual, and her expression so puzzled, that Bridget wisely concluded to leave her to make Johnny's acquaintance alone.

Johnny held out his hand, and smiled, as Bridget closed the door.

"Stay here a bit," she said, rising to leave the room; "I have a word to say to Mrs. Hale, and the afternoon is waning. Do you, Johnny, tell the bairn all about your feelin's. It's trying to be good she is."

"Come, you, and tell the sick boy about your nice country home," he said, kindly; "Bridget says it's a rare, sweet place."

Meta was shy, and held back for a while; but she could not resist Johnny's cheerful, sociable manners, and it was not many minutes before she was giving an animated account of Bellevue. In enthusiastic tones she described the ducks and cows, the little purling streams, and the spring at the foot of a hill, where she and Bridget had spent so many happy afternoons, and where she had waded in among the shining pebbles in her bare feet.

"The water was so cool and so clear that you could see my feet through. They looked very funny and broad. Do you like the country, Johnny?"

"I lived in it in the auld country," he sighed; "only my home was by the great sea, Meta, where I could hear the waves moaning and splashing on the shore. There were beautiful shells and sea-weed that my mother gave me for playthings, and I had my flowers, and a bonny bird. But I never went in the brooks, for I was always sick, and lay on my little cot by the window all day."

"Poor Johnny! I feel very sorry for you, indeed I do!" cried Meta, laying her dimpled hand on his poor, thin fingers.

"Yes," said Johnny, "I used to think it was hard-like for me never to run about like other childer, and fly my kites with the rest; but I see now how blessed I am in my helpless way, and I don't desire to be changed."

"Did you ever cry, Johnny, when you had so much pain?"

"Ah, that did I! When my back was so bad, and it was all so weak with me, indade I spent many a day fretting and crying. But now I think of the man with the withered hand, and comfort me with the hope of a new, whole body,

that will wash in the crystal waters. Did you ever hear of Bethesda, deary?"

Meta shook her head.

"I suppose I must, if it's in the Bible; but I forget those big names. It's very wicked, isn't it?" she asked, anxiously.

"Nay, not wicked," answered the boy, smiling at her earnestness; "it hasn't been brought home to you, like, I suppose."

Meta nodded.

"Ah, well, you see, it's trouble makes us look out the promises. You have no need to be readin' about the helpless and maimed, who were made 'every whit whole.' The dear Lord said something about 'they that be whole need not a physician.' Do ye see my meaning? But stop, I'll read to you."

Stretching out his hand, he took a small Bible off the table near, and opened its worn pages. Not that text, only, but one after another that had brought him so much comfort, as they most applied to his own case, were read eagerly to the absorbed listener, who sat with her face resting in her hands, gazing wistfully in Johnny's glowing countenance, though she only imperfectly understood it all.

"Do you see, they are *every one* made whole? The halt, the blind, the lepers, *all* cleansed?

But wait till I read ye the best of all my texts;" and, turning to 1 Cor. xv, the boy read to his astonished little friend the glorious promises of the resurrection.

"Oh, I am waiting," he cried, clasping his hands in an ecstasy of fervor, "waiting for the mortal to put on immortality, when death shall be swallowed up in victory!" The boy sank back in his chair, exhausted, carried out of his feeble body by the strength of those longings that had enabled him so safely to walk through the "dark valley" in which he would be only waiting in faith a little while. Meta, awe-struck and subdued, could not express in words all the sympathy she felt for her new friend, and they were both silent.

When Bridget returned she found her little friend sitting soberly near Johnny, tears hanging heavily on the dark lashes, and the mouth quivering with the grief she was too shy to show. Mrs. Hale patted the round cheek affectionately, and tied on the bonnet over her curls. Bridget had not spoken since her entrance. Going to Johnny, she hung over his chair a few moments, and kissed the pale forehead; then, taking Meta's hand, she was preparing to leave.

"Just one minute," whispered Meta, eagerly,

running to the boy and leaning her rosy face near to his own.

"I'm coming again, dear Johnny," she said in his ear; "I do so want to hear you read, and have you tell me about those beautiful things; for oh, I *am* trying to learn how to be good!"

Then she hurriedly shook hands with Mrs. Hale, and followed Bridget down stairs, out into the crowded streets, where the sights and sounds of busy life seemed in mocking contrast to the peaceful chamber, where even the child instinctively felt a human soul was preparing, in faith and love, for the great journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

As they walked along, waiting for a car, Meta noticed that Bridget's eyes were red and heavy.

"What's the matter?" she asked, sadly, pressing the woman's hand affectionately. "Are you crying about Johnny? *I* think he is so good and happy; and then, he doesn't look very sick, only thin."

"Ah, but I saw the doctor, darlint," returned Bridget, trying to control her voice; "and he says it's not for long the beautiful soul will be held back. Don't my own eyes tell me what a sore change has come over him since I left the city? Sure, he's almost got his wings, already, has Johnny. Oh, my poor boy!"

Bridget's tears could no longer be restrained, and, to Meta's infinite distress, she sobbed aloud. Many careless passers-by turned to look at the pair, as they walked along, weeping together, with no regard to the world.

"Will it be soon?" asked Meta, in an awed tone.

"Ay! He's winging his flight, says the good doctor — winging his flight."

Many more questions Meta longed to ask, but her friend could not command herself to speak; and it was a relief to both when they stood on the porch in Thirty-fifth street, waiting to be admitted.

Bridget was called off to her duties, and Meta to her mamma's dressing-room, as soon as they returned. Florry, and a half-dozen girls of her age, were playing parlor croquet; and, notwithstanding Meta's tear-stained face, she found herself drawn unwillingly into the noisy group. It was a very great contrast to the scene she had left; but, though subdued and thoughtful, Meta was too much of a child to resist the infection of gayety, and was not proof against the teasing endeavors of Florry's friends to make her join their game.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT must not be supposed that my little heroine became a Christian in one day, for this was by no means the case. Little seeds of truth were sown in the fair garden of her soil; but they came up slowly, and the harvest was a long way off. Summer's heats and showers, and winter's snows and frosts, were yet in store. Bad habits are not overcome in a day; nor do a few, or even many, good impulses create a new heart. Sometimes the Holy Spirit works slowly, and almost imperceptibly, but still he works; and we must not look for glorious conquests over self, nor great strides towards holiness, unless we have patience also for the days when deadness of spirit and unruliness of heart take the place of the longings, which are given us as well

for discipline as for peace. The weakness of human nature often overthrows our best desires; but let us not despair. There is a blessed promise to cheer us in seasons of self-abasement; and, however hard it is to water and tend the good seed sown, we know that in "due time we shall reap, if we faint not."

As time passed on, Meta found it very difficult to carry on, in New York, the same familiar intercourse she had enjoyed with Bridget at Bellevue. Mrs. Wallace, once alive to a sense of her daughter's peculiar tastes, felt a nervous fear of her becoming morbid and grave beyond her years; and, suspecting that Bridget's influence tended to encourage these tastes, she gradually withdrew Meta from her association. The Irishwoman was too valuable and honest to be dismissed; but as there was no further necessity of a constant attendant on a child of Meta's age, she managed to employ Bridget chiefly in household matters, though she still retained the nominal position of nurse.

A few days after the visit to Johnny, as Meta was skipping rope on the pavement, the familiar sound of a hand-organ, a few doors below, brought to her recollection the directions she had given the tambourine girl. Meta was a heedless child, and afflicted with a bad mem-

ory. Her visit to Johnny had entirely eclipsed everything that had taken place on that day; so it was with a considerable degree of reluctance that she skipped along the pavement to take a look at the party. Yes, there they were: organ-grinder, monkey, and tambourine girl; and she saw at once that the latter recognized her. Without waiting for their nearer approach, Meta threw her rope down on the pavement, ran quickly back to the house, up-stairs to her bureau, the drawer of which was eagerly opened, and the *porte-monnaie* drawn forth. But the silk-lined compartments were empty.

"Oh, dear! what *has* become of my money?" she exclaimed aloud; "I certainly didn't buy that big doll, but where can it possibly be? Let me see! I wonder if I got the *charlotte russe* that day?"

Florence, who sat curled up in the window-sill, reading, laughed mockingly at her consternation.

"Well, that *is* an idea!" she cried out; "why, Meta, don't you really know what you did with it?"

"No!"

"Then I'll tell you," said her sister, composedly. "You spent it right before my eyes for caramels and cream chocolates."

"Oh, yes!" sighed Meta; "I had forgotten all about it. And now I haven't a cent to give that poor child, and I promised her, too!"

"I comprehend," said Florry, who liked to use big words; "it's that horrid organ-grinder's dirty little girl. I shall ask papa to stop that nuisance. So you promised her, did you?"

"Yes, Florry; oh, do lend me a shilling!"

"Going in debt to be generous, eh? That's very benevolent and praiseworthy. You'd better remember your promises next time. *I* can't lend it, for I want to treat Nina Appleton to-morrow; besides, you might 'forget' to pay me back, you know."

"You needn't be afraid," said Meta, angrily; "and if you don't want to lend it, I don't care. I know what I'll do, see if I don't."

"You'd better not be charitable if it puts you in such a passion," sneered Florry. "What will you do, Miss Generosity? Oh, that horrible organ!" she cried, breaking off suddenly to stop her ears. "I say, man," raising the window, and scowling down on the two below, "go away from this house, and don't come back again!" She threw out a few pennies as she spoke, which the girl joyfully seized; and then, closing the window, she prepared to give Meta the benefit of her advice about organ-

grinders. But, to her amazement, Meta was nowhere visible.

The impulsive child, with her head full of the recollection of those bare, red feet outside, and overwhelmed with a sense of her forgotten promise, had gone to the closet while Florry opened the window, and selected at hazard one of her many pairs of walking shoes. Without an instant's reflection she ran out on the pavement, and was pressing the pretty kid shoes on the grateful and amazed girl, when the nursery window was again raised, and Florry's head poked out.

"Don't take those shoes," she cried, angrily; "I shall go right off to mamma, and tell her to stop you!"

The Italian looked completely puzzled, and Meta very indignant, when a new figure approached the group. Mr. Wallace, seated at the drawing-room window, had been an unseen observer of the whole affair, and was much amused at his little daughter's eagerness in giving away the pretty shoes, assuring the Italians that she had "oceans of them up-stairs." As soon, however, as her father appeared, she came to a sudden pause.

"Well, my dear?" asked Mr. Wallace, inquiringly.

"O papa!" was all she found voice to say.

Florence had, meanwhile, rushed out on the porch to stop the interview and give the organ-grinder a piece of her mind; but, seeing her father quietly standing at the man's elbow, she, too, paused for an instant. But she could not resist telling the great misdemeanor, and related it very glibly.

"She promised these people some money, papa, and then went and spent all she had. Do you think, because I wouldn't lend her a shilling, she didn't get a pair of her best balmoral kids to give that miserable little thing?"

Mr. Wallace, with a severe look, put a sudden stop to Florry's ready speech, and turned to Meta.

"What have you to say for yourself?" he asked, his mouth twitching with the effort to control his enjoyment of this novel entertainment.

"It's just as Florry says," she answered, ruefully; "but I did feel so sorry for the poor cold feet, and, indeed, I have ever so many pairs of shoes. Don't make me take them back, please, papa!"

The brown eyes looked so beseeching that Mr. Wallace drew out his pocket-book. Taking the shoes from the girl, and handing them back

to Meta, whom he desired to await him in the parlor, he bestowed a handful of change on the grateful child, and asked the Italian a few questions.

The sound of silver money in the tambourine produced great excitement in the heart of the little owner. It was a much larger sum than was needful to put shoes on the bare, red feet.

Then the organ was carried a few squares off, at Mr. Wallace's order, and only the faint tones came wafted back. Florence, in a miff, ran back to the nursery, and Meta, with many forebodings, sat very soberly awaiting her father's entrance in the drawing-room.

For almost the first time in his daughter's life-time, Mr. Wallace was brought face to face with her inner self. Though shy at first, Meta soon lost the awe of his presence, and got up on his knee very familiarly. Before the interview was over, she had told all about Johnny and her various tastes, opening her father's eyes to depths of child-life beyond his ken, and making him long to know more of his queer little daughter. The episode of the shoes was leniently dealt with, though she was gravely informed of the dishonesty of giving away her clothes without mamma's knowledge. Meta had a vague idea that it was not strictly just; but the full force of her father's arguments did not come to her then.

CHAPTER IX.

THE visits to Johnny were still carried on, but at long intervals. Mrs. Wallace nearly always contrived to keep the two apart; and though she gave Bridget time to visit, and even sent delicacies to, the sick boy, she managed to keep the girl very busy in Meta's leisure. Had she prohibited the child's going, there would have been no stolen interviews, for the Irishwoman never broke a promise; but, like Meta, she was a novice in such nice distinctions between right and wrong; and though they both felt that Mrs. Wallace did not approve of the hospital, they still seized every opportunity of going, since they had never been absolutely forbidden.

Johnny now suffered constant pain. He lay for whole days in one position, with his poor

back in agony; but his courage and fortitude never forsook him.

One evening Meta, having contrived to elude Florry's vigilance and accompany Bridget, they found the little sufferer so feeble that it was easy to see his troubles were nearly at an end. He had endured incessant pain all day, and, though his greeting was cheerful, the features seemed older and more worn.

"Ah, Meta, Meta," he whispered, "I'm nearer the 'great white throne,' nearer the 'jasper sea!' Sing me one of your sweet hymns!"

Meta's clear young voice had strangely developed itself in the sick chamber. It was her "one talent," and she was hardly conscious of its possession; yet the child was endowed with the rarest gift of song, and her sweet, liquid notes would have startled Florry's professor had he only heard. At home she seldom sang. Johnny had asked her, one day, for a favorite hymn, and she found that singing came as natural to her as to the birds; and so it grew to be a regular part of her visit, and added no little to the comfort and happiness of her friend.

"He will 'never, no, never, no, never forsake,'" repeated Johnny after her, as she ceased; "O Meta, it is so comforting to me to hear it. Sometimes I feel so lonely at the

thought of going all alone from the world; but then, when my heart shrinks, I think of those words. Do *you* ever think of dyin', Meta?"

"Not often," she answered, in a frightened tone; "I know I have to die, but I don't see how I can help being afraid."

"Never mind," said the boy, encouragingly; "when God has need of you he will give you the strength you cannot feel now. Did you ever see anybody die?"

"No; did you, Johnny?"

"Only my own mother," he sighed; "she bid me be a good, brave lad, and strive to do my duty; and her lips, as she kissed me oft and oft, were damp and cold, till I cried aloud with the fear of my heart. She did not think it would be long before I'd join her."

"Did they put her down in the dark ground?"

"Yes, the poor, weak body, they did; but my mother was far away from feeling cold nor dark. She, for all she lay so pale and still, was in that blessed country where God is wipin' away the tears from eyes that weep. Oh, to think there'll be no more cryin' nor any pain, and even me, with my poor, twisted, achin' body, will be praisin' and blessin' God!"

"How do you know, Johnny? What makes you so sure?" asked Meta's puzzled voice. The

question startled the happy little journeyer, who had relied upon the preciousness of the words so long. He turned the fading eyes full upon the child, saying, solemnly:

"'He is faithful that promised,' and I cannot be mistaken, Meta! The same Lord that said 'Write!' said, too, 'For these words are true and faithful.'"

He paused an instant, and smiled to see the earnest eyes so eagerly regarding him; then, reaching his little Bible, he opened at the book of Job, 19th chapter.

"There," he said, gently, "read the words yourself." She followed the direction of his hand, and read after him:

"'For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

"'Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another;—'"

"But, Johnny," said the child, as he looked triumphantly in her face, "I don't understand it all; do you?"

"Nay, nay," gravely shaking his head; "we do not know how they are raised, nor with what body they come. My Bible tells me it is a great 'mystery,' how 'corruption puts on incorrup-

tion;' it is enough for the likes of me to know that we shall surely rise again, and God will give us what bodies seem good to him."

"You talk like people in books, Johnny. Who told you all about dying and getting a new body? I know you read a heap, but I don't see how *that* can be! I always thought we turned into dust when we died. Are you sure we shall have sure enough bodies?"

"Yes, indeed," returned the boy, eagerly; "just listen to the very words!" And he read of the glorious fruits that followed on Christ's rising from the dead. The full meaning of the inspired language was beyond Meta's comprehension, but the simplicity of the metaphors helped her to take in the fact that God's power changes the natural into the spiritual body, just as that same power brings forth from the single grain the full corn in the ear.

"You see," resumed Johnny, "death comes first. The seed is not 'quickened except it die;' so my poor painful body must be laid in the ground, too, until I'll come forth in the new body, when I 'see God in the flesh.'"

"But wouldn't you rather have—" Meta paused abruptly, blushing in confusion.

"Rather have a new, whole, sound body like yours, do you ask? Don't you know what is fit

to stand before the 'great white throne' is fit for me? He says there will be no more sorrow nor crying; and if I took the aches and pains along with me, sure would the promise fail me then, for I could but weep and groan. No! I don't know how the Master works, but I am sure it will be done."

Johnny's tone of conviction had a great effect upon Meta. The mysteries of life and death had never been presented to her before, and the sight of a lad, only a few years older than herself, looking forward to that spiritual body, which she only feebly grasped at, filled her with anxiety to understand for herself.

The short afternoon was almost gone; but though Meta had in a measure stolen off for the visit, she would not have thought of the consequences had not Bridget's warning voice bade her remember that her mamma did not know she had come. Even then she obeyed the summons reluctantly, and leaned over to say a last word to the little dying Christian.

"Johnny," she whispered, hesitatingly, "will you let me read your book and learn for myself? I would love to stay here all the time, but, you see, I can't."

Johnny was silent an instant, in some perplexity. "People make their wills, you know,"

he said at last, brightly, "and I haven't much to leave. When I go," he nodded significantly, "then it'll be yours, and you can learn the way. I couldn't be happy without it," he went on apologetically; "it's like an old friend, you see!"

Meta hastily assured him "that would do," and they parted with a promise from the little girl that she would soon return.

CHAPTER X.

BUT Meta did not see Johnny again for weeks; during which time he rallied hopefully, only to grow worse again in the end.

When they reached home that evening it was quite late. The curtains were down, and gas-light streamed from every window. Bridget was greeted in the hall, by the butler, with the signs of a storm.

"Sure, the mistress is very angry, and ye two are wanted in the dressin'-room at oncet," said Thomas, smiling grimly.

"What is it now?" asked Bridget, hurriedly.

"Faith, and that you must find out for yourself," was his ungracious rejoinder.

Florence met them at the head of the stairs. "You've gone and got yourself in a nice fix,"

she cried, beginning to run down the steps. "I knew there'd be an end to your evening walks. I hope you've seen enough of that horrid hospital at last! And O Meta, you are not to go to mamma, but to the nursery; she only wants to see Bridget."

"Are you spaking the thruth?" asked Bridget, indignation bringing out her pronunciation.

"Yes, I'm spaking the thruth, sure," mimicked Florry, laughing, "and if Meta wants to find out to her cost, she'd better proceed to the dressing-room at once."

The child, though glad of an escape from the dreaded interview, was very much concerned that the storm should fall on her favorite's head; and she clung to Bridget, beseeching her to let her go to mamma, and tell her it was all her own fault.

But Bridget preferred to obey orders, and left her at the nursery door, with a few encouraging kisses, and the assurance that Johnny's condition would doubtless abate Mrs. Wallace's displeasure.

Meta sat in the nursery, in the dim light, for a long time; but no Bridget appeared. She was very courageous, and not at all afraid of being alone; but anxiety added clogs to the minutes, and her intentness in listening for the

dressing-room door to open magnified every sound in the house.

At last the door *did* open and close, Meta heard slow steps coming along the passage, and Bridget appeared on the threshold. There was a very sad, pained expression on her honest face, and her eyes were quite red from weeping. She ran to Meta, caught her hurriedly in her sturdy arms, and sank back in a chair, rocking herself to and fro.

"An' it's leave you I must, my darlint," she sobbed out, clasping the child closer to her breast; "it's leave you I must, and that at once."

"Leave me? Why, what did mamma say, Bridget? Is she very angry, and what is it about? Oh, don't go! You shall not go, my dear old Bridget!"

"An' I must, my honey. It's neither what we wish nor ask, but your mamma is very firm. I can't say she was over-unkind, but she is very quiet and determined-like."

"Oh, what *can* make her so angry?" sobbed Meta, burying her head in the nurse's breast.

And then Bridget told the result of her summons to Mrs. Wallace. It seems that Florence, who still slept in the nursery, had kept her mamma pretty well informed of the conferences indulged in by Meta and Bridget whenever the

latter was at leisure; and, knowing that Johnny and his religious views were more often discussed than anything else, the mother gradually grew provoked and alarmed at the extent of the girl's influence over her wayward child. She had long meditated getting rid of Bridget as quietly as possible; for, though her services were of great value, a thousand fears of Meta's growing "sanctified" and unchildlike beset her mind, and she preferred the annoyance of supplying a valuable servant's place to the possible future she had pictured for her little daughter. She was, therefore, very glad to seize this opportunity to reprimand Bridget severely, and inform her that she was no longer to be trusted with the charge of a child. In vain poor Bridget begged and wept, assuring her that she would promise anything if she would only be allowed another trial, and be retained in service. Mrs. Wallace was determined, and, with a contemptuous reference to Johnny — the innocent cause of her wrath — assured the girl that she must leave at once. Bridget's blood boiled as her little patient sufferer came in for a share of the blame, and she answered, in a quick, impetuous way:

"Sure, it's glad ye should be that the darlint should see one of God's own winging his flight!

O ma'am," breaking off in tears, "it's not for long he'll be in the way, and I'll promise she'll not see him again, if only ye'll keep me till the boy is gone! Sure, it'll break his heart, ma'am, the disgrace; and I as was never sent from a house before!"

But Mrs. Wallace had made up her mind. At any other time she would probably have yielded to the girl's evident distress, for she was not severe, nor cruel, only very selfish, and thoughtless of the pain her whims inflicted; but a great many disappointments, of one kind or another, had made her fretful for some time, and Bridget's natural defence of her brother was called an impertinence as she steeled herself against the pleading voice.

"I do not wish to mortify you, Bridget," she said, reluctantly, "and I am sure you will suffer nothing by leaving me. I shall send you to a friend in Brooklyn, who will pay even more than I have done; and as you have had no warning, I shall feel bound to give you a month's wages besides your due. Of this you surely cannot complain; but it is worse than useless to attempt to change my resolution. I beg you will say nothing more on the subject, and be ready to leave to-morrow."

"So soon!" interrupted Bridget, sadly.

Mrs. Wallace nodded slightly as she took out her purse and handed her a large bill. "Take this, and go," she said, not unkindly; "and if you need a friend at any time, apply to me; but I caution you against attempting to see Meta after you leave, as I should certainly make you feel the weight of my displeasure in such an event."

"Never fear, madame," returned Bridget, proudly, "I'll not trouble you again! Only," she continued, hesitatingly — "only, if the lad grew worse, and it would be a comfort to him, would you let her go there once?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered the lady, slightly frowning, as she bade the girl withdraw. Bridget did so with a heavy heart, muttering to herself as the door closed behind her:

"And ye'll shut the gates of the Golden City upon her, as Johnny talks about! Well, poor lamb! The Lord can take care of his own, in spite of ye!"

Mrs. Wallace's reflections were of a mixed character as she sat musing. A feeling of regret for her decision, and a half-desire to call Bridget back, mingled with intense relief that the disagreeable step, so long meditated, was finally taken.

"I have saved the child from vulgar associa-

tion and morbid influences," she thought, contentedly; "Félicie will give her some style, and she will have to talk French frequently. I shall send her to walk in the square regularly, too, and I hope this will throw her with suitable companions, notwithstanding her queer tastes."

And thus, so far as Mrs. Wallace was concerned, the question was satisfactorily settled. But not so with the pair who were rendered so miserable by the thought of separation. Their bitter tears and sad faces made excellent food for Florry's sarcasms at bed-time; but her efforts to provoke and annoy them were for once unheeded.

On the following morning, Meta screamed and cried in a very naughty way when her mamma attempted to reason with her grief. Sitting upon Bridget's trunk in the nursery, she vehemently refused to allow Thomas to remove it, though Mrs. Wallace scolded and threatened in a severe tone. In consequence of this rebellion, the adieux of poor Bridget were very faint, and rendered almost unintelligible by sobs that she could not restrain. Tom, at a signal from his mistress, lifted Meta in his sturdy arms, and deposited her on the dressing-room lounge, where Félicie awaited her.

"Sure, she's a rare 'un," he said, smiling grimly. "I wish ye joy of your place, miss."

The Frenchwoman, dressed very stylishly, and looking very much bored, came over to the lounge, and attempted to smooth the tumbled curls; but Meta thrust aside her hand rudely.

"Let me alone, Félicie!" she screamed, angrily. "I don't like you at all! I don't love any one but Bridget, and she's gone!" The last sentence was wailed forth to the wise-looking birds on the papering. The young woman turned up her nose, and went back to the book she had been reading; yet she staid by Meta the rest of the day.

Mrs. Wallace thought it best to leave the sorrowful child to bear her first grief alone, as a righteous punishment for her display of rebellious temper; but she was wrong. A mother's tender love and quiet reasoning would have soon subdued the spirit of angry contradiction, and Meta's tears of grief would have become those of repentance. Mrs. Wallace, like many others, "looked through a glass, darkly." Child-sorrows, with most people, are deemed trifling, and the rod more often used than love to assuage them; but in proportion to its sense of pain, childhood's griefs are keener than those of maturer years. Neither reason nor philosophy, nor even that spirit of passive endurance which some have learned in the rigorous school, aid the child-heart in viewing trouble

by the law of comparison; and religion is too abstract and dimly comprehended for faith to soothe, and humility to accept, as the justice of the All-Wise. Thrice blessed are those mothers who can distinguish between actual, willful naughtiness, and the sensitive spirit that creates its own miseries without design. It is a nice distinction, truly; and few of us pause to question it when seeming ingratitude and rebellion arouse our sense of justice. Yet it is a fearful power that we hold, and one requiring earnest watchfulness and prayer; for God, who has imparted it, alone knows the extent and consequences of the mother's influence; the task of rearing, teaching, restraining the human souls confided to us, making of them almost as much the creatures of our will and the result of our example as the potter doth with the clay, when he maketh one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor, as it pleaseth him. Many a morose, selfish, unbelieving man or woman is but the natural result of early impulses unchecked, childish miseries unsympathized with, childish trust abused.

Meta spent her whole day in tears. She refused all food, and lay on the sofa, counting the birds and flowers on the papering, and varying the amusement by making faces at Félicie.

With a heart as sad as her little charge, Bridget left the house, and went at once to Johnny, though she forbore to sadden him with the news of her dismissal. She found the little sufferer so calm and reconciled, his mind so engrossed with heavenly things, in the midst of excruciating pain, that she could not bring herself to add a feather's weight to the earthly clogs that were, in the shape of nature's weaknesses, holding the longing soul still fettered.

Later in the day, she crossed the ferry, and sought the elegant Brooklyn establishment, to which Mrs. Wallace's recommendation gained her instant admission and a good home.

Here we must leave her for awhile.

CHAPTER XI.

WE now pass over a period of some weeks, during which time Meta went daily to Madame Clive's elegant and exclusive school with Florry, and walked out in the afternoon with Félicie, who took her only to the gay parks, with other well-dressed children, or down Broadway to see the handsome stores, and crowds of people, or to look in the windows of the toy-shops. She still missed Bridget sadly, and longed for her with a sore heart, disliking the French maid in proportion as she loved her old nurse; yet she did enjoy walking and driving every day, and paying frequent visits to the confectioner, despite her griefs. At night her loss was most sensibly felt; for Félicie, who disliked nursing, was very cross sometimes, and often left her alone. At such times Meta cried

herself to sleep, and thought very hard things of the fate that had deprived her of her best friend. She would often revolve all sorts of impracticable schemes in her head for finding Bridget and Johnny, even going so far as to stow away bread and cake in her drawer for some future contingency, when she might run away from Félicie and everybody, and sleep for awhile in an alley, until some good Samaritan should pick her up and bring her home; in which event, she pictured everybody in great consternation, and full of repentance and good-will, when she was duly deposited in Thirty-fifth street by the aforesaid good Samaritan. But, owing to the wholesome awe in which Félicie held her mistress, Meta's runaway ideas never had room to develop; the Frenchwoman kept a strict watch over her in their daily intercourse, and often complained to her nursery acquaintances that her charge was one of the greatest afflictions in life. It must not be supposed that Meta's desperate feelings were of long duration; for, like other children, she was easily roused from even real sorrow by distractions. She had many delightful play hours at school, and her favorites among her classmates, and even enjoyed an occasional doll's party, though she was no longer reduced to imaginary characters for her feasts.

Florry, being at that age when she considered it smart to look down upon little girls, made her sister's school-days, at first, something of a trial. Even in Meta's choice of a friend she snubbed and sneered at her. Madame Clive, though professing to have a most exclusive school, admitted to the honor of scholarship the daughters of several tradesmen; among whom was Alice Agneau, the child of the very confectioner at whose counter the dollar for Johnny had been expended. Meta had always liked the sweet, girlish face, long before she was made hopelessly captive by Alice's kindness in explaining away the mysteries of that childish bugbear, "fractions," over which she one day bent her puzzled face and tortured her poor head in vain. On the homeward walk, she had ventured to tell Florry that "Alice Agneau was the very delightfullest girl in school;" at which Florry's nose turned up still higher as she said, with a grand air:

"Agneau? Why, that's where I buy cream puffs and *meringues*, on Sixth avenue!"

"Yes, it's the very place. Alice brings crullers to school every day, and —"

"Has found that the way to your heart is straight down your throat, eh? Fie! I wouldn't be bought over with crullers!"

"Neither am I! Alice helps me do those dreadful sums, and I like her ever so much. She speaks French a great deal better than you, or Nina Appleton, either, *I* can tell you!"

"Very likely," returned Florry, unmoved; "and she probably understands the art of baking better, I dare say!" The discussion lasted until they reached home, and both were somewhat excited.

"I don't care if you *do* tell mamma," was Meta's half-crying exclamation, as they waited for Thomas to answer the bell; "Alice is good to me, and I don't care what you say!"

"And so you said about that horrid Bridget," said Florry, sneering; "it's a wonder to me you always choose friends that haven't any ancestors."

"People are obliged to have ancestors!" cried Meta, angrily; "you know they are! I'm sure it doesn't matter whether they lived—"

"On cream puffs, for instance," suggested Florry.

"In cake-shops, I say, or in—"

"Ireland," finished Florence, provokingly. "Come! You can't deny that your two friends' fathers probably subsisted on cream puffs and 'praties.' You know, Meta, mamma will want to know about Alice; she is very aristocratic, and her grandfather—"

"Yes, where did *he* come from?" asked Meta, quickly.

"Why," began Florry, meditatively, "I really forget where he *did* come from, though I know he was a big man somewhere. I'm sure of it! Let me see! I guess he jumped out of the ark window, and floated down; for I can tell you, mamma's family is awfully old. So, my dear, take my advice, and let confectioners' daughters alone." Florence tapped Meta's chin provokingly with her lead pencil as they entered the hall, and ran away up-stairs, leaving her sister to her own reflections.

"I wish — I wish," said the child, slowly, "oh, I wish I was going with Johnny; then they wouldn't all treat me so! I mean to run away and find that hospital, if I can only get away from Félicie, and then nobody can find me!"

As she went slowly up-stairs, she met her father, who was hastily coming down and jostled against her. As he stopped an instant, to pat the pretty cheek, a sudden thought struck her:

"O papa," she cried, eagerly, "mayn't I go with you walking this evening? I am *so* tired of Félicie."

"Not now, my dear," returned her father, hur-

riedly; "I have lost a very valuable paper, and must go to Bellevue in a day or two. When I come back, Meta! Kiss papa, my daughter! Here, take this, and buy yourself something pretty." And, slipping a half-dollar in her hand, he passed on down the stairs, leaving Meta in a brown study. Something in her father's manner recalled her old dread of him, which she had in a measure overcome; and the mention of "valuable paper" recalled her long-forgotten trouble before their return to the city. Was it possible that the paper she had destroyed was really valuable, and its loss the source of so much anxiety as to cause a trip to Bellevue? The question presented itself again and again, and brought with it so much perplexed thought that Meta wondered how she could have forgotten it so soon. The more she reflected, the more probable this solution of her father's gravity seemed to her; and the possibility of having to confess a piece of naughtiness, involving she knew not what disgrace or loss, made her really miserable. All through her early dinner with Félicie she found herself longing for Bridget, and regretting, too late, the obstinacy that refused to confide her mysterious behavior in Mrs. Walker's room to her faithful friend.

"O Johnny," was her constant thought, "how hard it is for me to be good!"

An intense longing to see the sick boy took possession of her, as her vivid imagination pictured the possible result should her mischief have been really discovered, and her father's loss be traced to her meddling fingers.

All through the elaborate toilette which Félicie deemed necessary for a walk in Washington square, Meta pondered sundry desperate schemes for getting to Johnny, whose advice and sympathy she relied on in her dilemma. She felt that he could tell her what was best to do, or, at any rate, satisfy the doubts and fears that had assailed her. But how get rid of the maid?

"Félicie," she asked, timidly, "don't you think you could find the hospital, if I told you what cars to take?"

"The hospital!" repeated Félicie, holding up her hands; "why, madame has forbid the hospital. She will be ver' angry! No, I can go to only shops and parks."

"But you will go to Agneau's, and get some nice *meringues,* won't you?" asked the child, coaxingly. Meta had some strategy in her composition.

"Ah, but yees," answered Félicie, soothingly; "now you talk wisdom, *mignonne.* Certain, we will go to Agneau."

The hair was curled to Félicie's satisfaction,

and her own and Meta's hats stylishly adjusted; then they sauntered forth, apparently the best of friends. Meta was in high spirits. A hope of success buoyed her up as she thought of François, the good-natured waiting-boy at Agneau's, who had known her for so many years, and always chatted so kindly across the counter. Meta was one of his best, and decidedly his favorite, customer, and François always put an extra puff or candy in her parcels. Might she not find Johnny with the assistance of the kind French boy? Félicie's taste for sweets might serve her a good turn yet.

Very happy, she skipped along by the maid's side to the Sixth avenue, and was soon looking into Agneau's glass case.

While Félicie discussed, in her native tongue, the merits of a new confection exhibited by old Agneau, Meta held a whispered conference with François at the other end of the long counter.

"Do you know where a big stone hospital is, François?"

The boy smiled. "Yes, ever so many," he replied, with a curious look in her earnest face.

"But I mean one that you take those cars," pointing to one passing, "and ride ever so far, and then get out and walk a square."

"I can't say," returned François, shaking his head, "though I had a cousin that died in one—"

"But they don't have small-pox and cholera in this one, François, and you needn't be afraid. Johnny *is* going to die, but it's only his poor back, you know. Can't you think where your cousin was? Oh, do, please!"

"I can look in the Directory, and ask monsieur," said François, seeing her earnestness; "but, mademoiselle, what do you want in a hospital?"

"I *must* see Johnny! Oh! can't you help me a bit, François?"

Here Félicie came up to the two, looking curiously at the shop-boy, and telling Meta to "come on." The sharp glance of her black eyes made him color up, but, seeing Meta's look of disappointment at receiving no answer, he leaned over and whispered a few words:

"*J'éspère que oui*," he said, unconsciously, in French. "*Je vous dirai demain; venez sans faute.*" Here Félicie, though she heard nothing, began to suspect a plot, and, taking Meta's hand, walked her unceremoniously out of the store. The child gave a despairing sigh as she went along the avenue in silence.

"Oh," she thought, regretfully, "I wish I

could understand French people! If I was only as smart as Florry, or had studied my lessons, or talked to Félicie. But I can't! She is so hateful; that's why I don't like French. '*J'éspère que oui — venez sans faute — Je vous dirai demain*' — oh, what does it all mean, I wonder?"

But, though she remembered the words, the solution of François' attempted consolation could not be found. Florence found her at bed-time with a big French dictionary on her knee, looking out the words, sleepily.

"Getting mighty studious," laughed Florry, yawning, as the troubled face was lifted to hers.

"O dear Florry, what *does* this mean?" she asked, pleadingly, as she slowly repeated her sentence, or such of it as she could remember.

"You little stupid!" replied her sister, condescendingly, glad to exhibit her superior knowledge; "I never heard such pronunciation! '*Je vous dirai demain*' means 'I will tell you tomorrow.' What is the rest?"

But this was enough for Meta. With very grateful thanks for the information, she shut up her book, and began to undress, resisting Florry's teasing to learn "what she wanted to know for," and not resenting her insinuation that she was up to some mischief.

All the next day in school, she was absorbed in

the coming escape from Félicie, and her various modes of eluding vigilance utterly interfered with her lessons. The "fractions" had assumed a giant aspect, and not even Alice's efforts to explain could make her see any result to her sums but a big stone building and long flights of stairs. Madame Clive administered a severe rebuke, but it did not avail much; and Meta drew a sigh of relief when she was dismissed in disgrace to her seat, where she indulged in her plans for the afternoon until school closed.

After dinner, as Florry and Félicie were talking and laughing in the nursery, Meta took advantage of an animated discussion of Nina Appleton's perfections to leave them unobserved. She ran hastily down-stairs, caught her hat off the entry rack, and rushed out of the back entrance.

After a hard run, she reached Agneau's, completely out of breath.

"O François," she cried, panting, "I know what you meant! See! I've come in time. Can you take me now? Oh, don't say no, please!"

"Mademoiselle," he said, gravely, "I've been thinking it over, and why you not tell madame? Suppose you get in a fix?"

"Oh, indeed, I don't want to do anything but

see Johnny; the boy with the bad back, you know! I'm in so much trouble, and *he* will be sure to know what I ought to do. Did you find the place?"

"Yes, but—"

She interrupted him with a piteous look. "I will promise to be ever so good, and come home just when you wish me to; you needn't even let go of my hand. O François, please come along! Félicie doesn't miss me, and I want to hurry back!"

François was not proof against her entreaties; and when, on calling Agneau into the conference, the old man thought there couldn't be much harm done, he resisted no longer.

The pair were comfortably seated in the cars, and some way down the avenue, before Meta's loss was discovered by the angry Félicie.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHNNY was very much startled at sight of the little girl without Bridget. "Where is my sister?" he asked, anxiously, after giving Meta a joyful greeting. "Why didn't you bring her along too? how did you come, and who is this?"

Meta looked at him, wonderingly.

"Why, Johnny, didn't you know that Bridget lives in Brooklyn now?"

The boy's face clouded over as he looked wistfully at his little friend; and Meta related the story she had unwittingly betrayed.

"And is it run off you have?" asked the sick boy, his eyes filled with tears at her recital.

"O Johnny, *was* it wrong? Indeed, I wanted you ever so bad, and I knew Félicie wouldn't come with me. You see, I had to run away."

"But she doesn't wish you to visit the likes of me," sighed the boy, in a mortified tone; "and though we can't see as how one who is almost gone from poverty and sin could hurt you much, Meta, yet we know what the command is, deary: 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' Sure, you must even do as ye're bid, if ye'd learn the Way."

"Don't scold me, dear Johnny, I can't bear it," sobbed Meta, covering her face. "Oh, I didn't mean to be wicked; I only wanted you to tell me how to do something mighty hard to do; and now you're angry with me — I know you are!"

"Nay, Meta," he returned, sadly, "it's very nice and good in you to think my poor help any great things, and I'll not say but your face is a very comforting sight to my eyes, as sees only red walls and the skies all day; but I daren't bid you steal away from home to come to me, and it's not right for me to even speak to you against your own mother's will."

But Meta would not go. She cried long and bitterly over the new lesson, but she had run too much risk, in order to obtain his advice, not to tell her source of unhappiness, and seek comfort and aid through his superior knowledge of the right.

After the tears were exhausted, she turned to François.

"Won't you go over there?" she asked, hesitatingly, pointing to the window; "I want to tell something to Johnny, and I know you won't mind."

"Oh, no, I won't mind," answered François, smiling, as he turned off; "only don't make it too long. Five minutes, little lady, and we must go, for sure enough!"

The five minutes passed, however, long before Meta's whole trouble could be told; for she began with her various naughty doings at Bellevue, and did not end until the piece of mischief was brought to her mind by her father's loss of a valuable paper, and the sudden anxiety it had occasioned. When it was all revealed, she drew a long breath, and looked anxiously in Johnny's face.

"What must I do?" she asked, plaintively; "what would you do, I mean?"

"I was never tried," returned Johnny, simply; "but if I was, I am sure I would make an end of it, and tell my father the whole thing—"

"But," she interrupted, quickly, "you know the paper might not have been worth anything, and then I would have all the fright and punishment for nothing, you see. O Johnny, isn't

there some other way? You don't know how angry papa will be!"

But Johnny did not think this made any difference when a fault was to be atoned for or a duty plain.

"It will be a step in the right way," he said, consolingly, "and I doubt me if your father will be very wroth if you confess it all. See, Meta: the tearing it up was careless, but it wasn't sinful until you kept back the truth, like, and acted a lie — "

"I never told a lie in my life," she cried, flushing and drawing herself up. "No, Johnny, I'm not so bad as you think me."

"And wasn't it dishonest, think ye," he asked, patting her head, "to keep it away from all knowledge so long, when it was your father's property, and you had destroyed it? Ah, Meta, there's many a hard thing we must do, and many a deep thing to learn, before we come to the reward! You did the mischief from a thoughtless way you have; but was it thoughtless to hide it and try to swallow your sins?"

"Swallow my sins? O Johnny, you are laughing at me — I know you are — "

"No," he said, smiling; "didn't you swallow the paper to get rid of the blame and the punishment? But, Meta, we can't do this with our

sins, for God takes account of them even if the world never suspects us, and if we go on and on with praise given us instead of blame. So it's no use to hide what God sees and will surely punish us for in time. Besides, if the paper is not worth anything, you will have done your duty, and he will look down and bless you, deary, for he knows it's not easy to confess our faults; and telling is not going to alter it at all, or make it valuable if it isn't. Do you see?"

Meta nodded her head.

"It will be found out, you mean," she said, slowly, as she tried to take in the nice difference between willful persistence in concealment, and accidental mischief. "Yes, I suppose it will some of these days, whether I ever tell or not. Oh, I never did think of that before, and it's strange I didn't, for I have thought over it so much—"

François here approached, and interrupted them unwillingly.

"You see the time, mademoiselle," he said, warningly pointing to the big clock ticking away on the mantel; "it's a good ride, too, and you have escape Mademoiselle Félicie—"

"Sure enough!" cried Meta, starting up and turning suddenly to Johnny. "God saw me do that too, didn't he?" she asked, remorsefully. "O Johnny, will I have to tell Félicie?"

"You should do it," he said, earnestly, as she leaned over to say good-bye.

The child sighed ruefully as she followed François down-stairs; but though Johnny's reasoning had convinced her, she was hardly disposed to follow his advice. Like many a wiser head, she shrunk from manifest duty, because there was mortification and pain in confession; and all during the ride homeward, she was trying to persuade a very willing agent in such matters — self-love — that there was no actual use in being as good as Johnny was. She might have been worried and fretted for nothing, after all; and at any rate it could do no harm to wait and see what came of it, before she acknowledged herself culprit. Johnny's suggestion that it would be found out, even if she never told it, had produced a directly opposite effect to what he designed; inasmuch as Meta's conscience took refuge behind this possibility, and was certainly assisted in comforting itself by the very means that her young friend had intended as an incentive to confessing her sin.

Meta reached Agneau's in safety, and was in so much more cheerful a frame of mind that, finding François in some trouble at having overstaid his time, and old Agneau very cross, she

volunteered to run behind the counter, and help tie up the bundles, as the shop was full. Here she was standing, very eager and intent upon her novel employment, when a familiar voice startled her.

"Agneau," cried a young girl, very fashionably dressed, "Agneau, give me a dollar's worth of vanilla *meringues;* and please be quick about it, for I am in a great hurry."

Meta looked up in amazement, as Florence — for she it was — made this demand in an imperious tone.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the elder sister, scornfully. "So you're here, are you? I told Félicie it wasn't worth while to worry mamma with the information that you'd run off; I knew you'd turn up in some horrid place. But you'd better get in the carriage, miss, and come along with Nina and me. Mamma won't fancy your turning shop-girl, I can tell you."

Meta hurriedly threw down her bundles, and called François, while Florry, in a supercilious manner, lectured the boy for allowing her sister to wait in the store.

"I shall certainly inform mamma of your presumption," she said, grandly.

François did not reply, fearing to get his employer into trouble; and after some delay in fill-

ing Florry's order, during which he was soundly lectured by that indignant young woman, the two sisters left the store.

Meta's drive home with Nina Appleton and Florry was not very agreeable, as she was unmercifully quizzed about her recent employment at Agneau's; but she bore it without much display of temper.

Félicie was in a very bad humor when she saw the truant. Though greatly relieved at her safe return, she was exceedingly wroth at having lost her evening's airing, through the state of anxiety she had been in from the time Meta's loss was discovered until she was seen comfortably seated beside Thomas on the box of her mamma's stylish turn-out.

It is fortunate Meta's knowledge of French was limited, as a very torrent of invectives was poured out in that language as soon as Félicie had her safe in the nursery. The child had great power of control over her tongue, which was termed obstinacy by those in authority, and often listened to a long harangue from the maid without indulging in Florry's accomplishment, "answering back." One reason of this singular virtue was her unusual consciousness of her short-comings. When once her conscience took sides against her, she endured chastenings very

humbly; and perhaps, too, the knowledge that rigid silence added more to Félicie's discomfiture than impertinence enabled her sometimes to submit.

On the evening in question, the advent of a visitor from the far West, who had once been in Mr. Wallace's employ, procured for the little girl the rare luxury of taking her place at the sumptuous seven o'clock dinner. Félicie, despite her sound lecture, was diligently dressing her to go down-stairs, and assuring her that it was of no use trying to make anything look well on a child who had such queer tastes. Meta didn't care much about this, however; she was wishing she dared disobey mamma's orders, and spend her evening up-stairs. Though she dearly loved to dine with her parents and the lively visitors they generally had, and did not disdain the delicious desserts, the idea of meeting a stranger, who had asked especially to see the children, made her very bashful and averse to going down. "Mr. Wallace had *not* gone to Bellevue," Félicie informed her, after some urging. "The gentleman down-stairs was a ver' great friend and ver' handsome;" together with much more that the child did not heed. It was a great relief to know that papa had not gone, after all; for it helped to convince

her willing conscience that she had made much ado about nothing. After some hesitation in the hall, Meta entered the drawing-room shyly; but no one noticed her at all. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace were gayly chatting with a handsome middle-aged stranger; and Florry, seated on a divan by her mother, was very much absorbed in the conversation.

Meta sat down as far from the group as possible, and would never have proclaimed herself had not the last bell sounded and the group at the fire arisen. The stranger stopped in front of the little shy figure as they passed.

"And who is this little woman, Wallace?" he asked, laying his hand on the curly head. "It makes a man feel old to see his years so well marked in the growth of the rising generation."

"This is Meta, our youngest," said her father, smiling encouragingly in the blushing face, while Mrs. Wallace telegraphed that she was to take her finger out of her mouth. Not comprehending her mamma's mysterious signs and nods, poor Meta only hung on more resolutely to the friendly finger, the biting of which seemed to endow her with sufficient fortitude to stand her mamma's frowns.

Mrs. Wallace, with a sigh of chagrin at the child's awkwardness, looked mournfully in the

gentleman's face, and, laying her hand caressingly on Florry's shoulder, exclaimed, half-piteously:

"Ah, Mr. Ascher, there is always a black sheep in the flock! My sweet Florence—"

But Mrs. Wallace's observations were cut short. At mention of the stranger's name, Meta's head was suddenly jerked from the kind hand that patted the curls, and its owner made an unceremonious departure from the room. Mr. Ascher laughed gleefully, but the parents frowned.

"Meta is *so* awkward and queer," sighed the mother, apologetically; but Mr. Ascher, who seemed to enjoy the episode, politely smiled.

"Mere childish bashfulness, dear madam; don't trouble yourself to excuse her, I beg! Indeed, I enjoy, in this too advanced age, a little old-fashioned exhibition of the whims of childhood—"

"That's not half as bad as what she did this afternoon," interrupted Florry, who was no respecter of age, and seldom allowed any one to finish a sentence.

"Indeed, my dear, and what was that?" inquired Mr. Ascher, as he gave the "white sheep" of the family a searching gaze.

"Why, she was actually waiting on Agneau's

customers," returned Florry, immensely important; "and I had to lecture that François for his presumption, for Meta didn't seem to think it was anything at all!"

"Waiting on Agneau's customers?" repeated the mortified mother; "surely, Florry, you must be mistaken."

But Florence vouched for the truth, and related the incident, in her usual style of exaggeration, on the way to the dining-room. Mr. Ascher was infinitely amused, and drew the "white sheep" out to her heart's content; but, observing that his host and hostess were by no means entertained with Florry's revelations, he politely turned the conversation into other channels, though he would have taken great interest in Meta's idiosyncrasies and her sister's knowledge of the world.

Meanwhile our little friend, all unconscious of the storm brewing, sat at the head of the stairs, rocking herself to and fro disconsolately, and repeating the name of "Joseph Ascher" in a most distressed tone of voice. Her late cheerfulness had vanished at sound of that name; the signature, in well-known manly characters, at the end of the paper she had unfortunately swallowed, loomed up before her in all its former terrors, and brought Johnny's advice

painfully to mind. She did not dare to go down again with the consciousness that mamma was very angry, nor did she like going without her dinner; but of the two evils she chose the latter, and sat on the steps until Florry came up to bed, with the consoling advice to "prepare for the worst scolding she had ever had in her life, for papa and mamma were dreadfully angry."

Used as she was to Florry's exaggerations, Meta made no reply; but she asked, with a faint hope that her ears had deceived her:

"What is the gentleman's name, Flo?"

"Why, papa's old clerk, Mr. Joseph Ascher; he is ever so rich, and I heard mamma say that papa had put off his visit to Bellevue, just to see him, for he is a great favorite with both of them. So you're in another fix, you see!"

When Meta knelt down to say her prayers, the first petition that came unconsciously from her heart was:

"O Lord, take me to heaven with Johnny!"

But Meta, like many grown people, would have been sorry to have her prayer answered; and God, who "knoweth whereof we have need" before we ask him, has not ordained to answer, save in his own way and in his own time.

CHAPTER XIII.

TO Meta's surprise and relief, nothing was said of her naughtiness the following day; and, indeed, the whole week passed, and the predicted scolding never came. During this time, Mr. Ascher took great notice of the shy, wondering child, whose earnest dark eyes were so often fixed wistfully on his face. He was so affectionate and entertaining, took her to walk and drive so kindly, and was altogether so charming, that Meta's fears gradually vanished. She ate his *bon-bons* with relish, and was growing to be unreserved in his society, when one day she received a summons to her father's library, and felt sure that at last her sentence was coming. Tremblingly she entered the room, where her father and mother, with their visitor, were awaiting her. They made

room for her at the fire as she came shyly forward, and her father advanced encouragingly to take her hand. After some commonplace conversation, Mr. Wallace began, very gravely:

"My daughter, are you quite old enough to make a choice?—"

"Let *me* put the case, sir," interrupted Mr. Ascher, hastily; "I fancy I shall be successful with my young friend."

Mr. Wallace smiled an assent, and Meta, wondering what it could all mean, was drawn over to Mr. Ascher's side, as he bade her look in his face, and listen attentively.

"Will you go with me, and be my little girl?" he asked, anxiously, yet very kindly.

"Forever?"

The tone of her voice, as she said this, looking the while in the tender gray eyes, touched them all. Tearfully, she turned a beseeching face to her parents.

"O papa and mamma! do *you* want me to go away and be his little girl, when I'm your very own?" she sobbed. "I don't mean to be so bad; indeed, I try not! Oh, don't send me away from you—"

Before she could finish her sentence, Mr. Wallace, with a reproachful glance at his wife, pressed the poor little one to his heart, as he answered, with emotion:

"No, my daughter, you shall never leave us, save of your own free will! Mr. Ascher has put his case strongly. He only wants to take you with him to Europe, to stay several years; and has promised you so many advantages that your mamma and I know not what answer to make. But you have decided yourself, my little girl, and you have only to tell Mr. Ascher that you will not go."

"Pshaw!" said the determined Mr. Ascher, as Meta's joyful eyes were raised anxiously to his, half fearful that her decision had estranged him. He walked over to the window, visibly annoyed, and the trio at the fire were very silent. Mr. Wallace was reproaching himself for the little he had ever done to endear him to this loving nature, which clung, despite coldness and neglect, to the natural ties he had ignored; while his wife, touched and softened more than she cared to show, was yet reflecting on the great advantages lost to the perplexing child by what she termed a "foolish sentimentality." Poor Meta was, meanwhile, doing her utmost not to cry, as she felt such a longing to do.

Mr. Ascher presently returned, and, standing with his back to the fire, looked down in the timid face.

"My little lady," he said, coaxingly, "do you

know what you are refusing? I dare say New York suits you well enough in its way, but just think of all the nice things you could have with me! jewels and dresses, and the finest dolls and playthings. You've read about Paris, haven't you? Did you ever hear of the big stores where the dolls have all sorts of fine clothes made, just like your extravagant New York ladies? You can see the world, and yet come back whenever you get tired of me. Is it a bargain? Come!"

Meta looked up into the kind face in a troubled sort of way.

"I don't care for all these things," she answered, stoutly; "mamma gives me heaps of clothes, and I am tired playing with dolls. You can't give me my mamma way off there!" And here, obeying a sudden impulse, she ran and buried her face on Mrs. Wallace's shoulder, throwing her arms around her mother's neck.

Mrs. Wallace stroked her hair, but said nothing. In very truth she was sorely perplexed; for Meta had so long been a source of anxiety and mortification that, though not devoid of maternal feeling, she had hailed Mr. Ascher's unexpected offer to "educate" and leave his large fortune to the "little black sheep" as a relief from her perplexity. All the scru-

ples of motherhood were silenced with the plausible brilliancy of her child's future should she really accept the liberal offer; and she *would* have accepted it, at once, had not her husband strenuously insisted upon referring the matter to his little daughter. Though fearing a scene, she had yielded to his wish, but thought it a very absurd proceeding, as the advantages were so great that she had no scruple in forcing the child's compliance. She had already formed a plan for Meta's removal from home, when Mr. Ascher's surprising offer was made; and had only put off the execution thereof from that spirit of procrastination that had governed her when anything disagreeable was to be done. Believing that to yield was weakness, she did not return Meta's suffocating caresses, though she felt her firmness give way under the unlooked-for evidence of the child's ardent love.

Meanwhile, as her curly head rested on her mother's shoulder, very incongruous thoughts were flitting through the young brain.

"Oh, what *shall* I do?" she mused, sadly. "If mamma wants me to go, I just can't help myself at all. Oh, I wish I hadn't been so wicked that she wants to send me away! It must be mighty nice to travel all around with a good old gentleman, who wants to give you all

kinds of nice things. I wonder what he likes me for? Florry says I am so queer, and I know I don't seem a bit good. I expect Paris is very delightful; François says the people eat *bonbons* every day. I wonder if that's the place where the children eat macaroni in the street. I think I'd like to tell Mr. Ascher all about that paper. If I did it while we were out on the ocean, maybe he wouldn't scold a bit; because I'm sure I'd be seasick. Oh, dear! I wonder if *he* could help me to be good?"

As this thought came uppermost, she suddenly raised her head, and looked at him attentively.

"Wallace," cried Mr. Ascher, catching the doubtful glance, "we will leave this choice for a day or two, to let the little brain take it all in! And now, do you tell her the alternative, that she may judge fairly."

Mrs. Wallace, very much relieved at the idea, gave Meta a letter she had held in her hand, and bade her open and read it. Wonderingly, the child obeyed, and read as follows:

Glencove Hall, January —.

MY DEAR ALICIA:

I will very gladly take charge of your young daughter for any length of time you may desire. With us she will only find a plain, comfortable home, but there are many educational ad-

vantages which I am sure will outweigh the absence of those luxuries to which she has been accustomed. For the terms of my school, I enclose a circular. Mrs. Leslie bids me send her kind greetings, and to assure you that she will do all in her power to supply your place. I trust you will decide to send the child, as I feel assured of the advantage to her of good country fare, and freedom from those restraints which it is impossible to avoid in your position. Awaiting your decision in the matter,

Your affectionate kinsman,

SIDNEY LESLIE.

Meta read the letter in silence, though her cheek flushed, and the sensitive mouth quivered warningly. Mrs. Wallace allowed a passion of tears to exhaust itself in her arms, and then, telling Meta that she need not decide just then, led her from the room gently.

In the entry she met Félicie, who at once took her captive up-stairs, where Florence awaited the result of the long conference in a high state of curiosity. Meta was entertained with an enlivening account of the delights awaiting her if she went with Mr. Ascher to Europe, and the horrors of a "poking country school," as Florry dignified it.

"You are a little goose, Meta," she said, with her usual candor. "I wish I had known Mr. Ascher's tastes better. Why, it's worth playing shop-girl, to have such a rich man wanting to

give you all his money! You'd be worth even more than papa, I reckon, and oceans more than poor me. Why on earth don't you go, child? You won't find that horrible Leslie school any great things, I tell you!"

"But then you know, Florry, mamma may let me stay at home altogether—"

"But who would stay poking at home when they could go to Paris, and wear kid gloves in the morning, and eat *biscuits glacés* whenever they felt like it?"

"I don't want to go to Paris, for I don't know anybody there! I'd rather—"

"Live and die a savage! I believe you would. All I can say is, you're a great little goose, and I hope you'll find congenial society at old Father Leslie's!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE week allotted to Meta for a decision passed off quickly, and yet she had never been so thoughtful before in her short life. Anxiety to follow in Johnny's difficult footsteps fought hard with the alluring visions of future greatness held up daily by the eloquent Félicie, and made very substantial by the present luxuries and privileges Mr. Ascher's offer had brought her. Whenever she felt inclined to thrust away the temptation of being petted and spoiled, and thought of Johnny's very different aspirations, the disagreeable reflection that she was deciding between Europe and a boarding-school made her resolutions to give it all up very wavering and uncertain. In a long, serious talk with mamma, she was made to see that, failing to go with Mr. Ascher, she was con-

demning herself to a far more trying separation from all she loved; and this went far toward inclining her to what seemed the evident wish of the household. For the first time in her life, she was the object of special interest to the whole family; and even among her sister's friends she found herself suddenly elevated from the "queer little girl, who actually waited in Agneau's shop," to "that fortunate child of the Wallace's, whom, they say, Mr. Ascher is going to leave his millions to." Even Félicie changed, and never attempted to thwart or scold; while Florry lost no opportunity of holding forth on the superior good fortune that had fallen to her sister's lot.

Meta found it very pleasant to drive about with Mr. Ascher, and partake of the nice lunches and boxes of candy which his partiality provided. She enjoyed, too, her evenings in the drawing-room, where she saw so many funny people, and heard all about the great world outside. She began to feel that there was something altogether delightful in having somebody anxious to adopt her, and the whole household so gracious and condescending; she could but think of the probable dolefulness of her cousin's school, in contrast to all this, and it had its natural effect.

Mr. Ascher's offer had been made known to her on Thursday. On the following Sabbath, it occurred to the little girl — as the quiet day, bringing a momentary cessation of her pleasures, reminded her of more serious things — to ask her kind friend something about Johnny's ideas of duty, and discover if he might not help her to find the gates of the Golden City. As they walked along Fifth avenue on the way to church, she suddenly thought of this requisite in the new friendship, and glanced up in the gentleman's face, to see if he looked like Johnny's description of one who is "reaching forward unto those things that are above." The expression of the face puzzled her, and she was not encouraged in the hope that he was anything like Johnny's pattern when, during the church service, Mr. Ascher never once opened his book, but sat with his arms over the back of the pew, making evident mental comments on the people near him; nor later, when he turned to look at the pretty faces in the choir, after a particularly fine chorus; nor when, during the sermon, he examined critically, with his walking cane, the end of his highly polished boot, and hid a yawn behind his gloved hand.

"I know Johnny would never behave so in church," thought Meta, as she made her exami-

nation of her unconscious friend; "I am afraid it's very bad in Mr. Ascher to look behind him, and yawn so often; yet *he's* good, if anybody is."

At last the grand organ pealed out the final aria, and the congregation arose. When they were outside on the crowded pavement, Meta, after a long silence, suddenly addressed her companion.

"Mr. Ascher," she said, timidly, "do you know the way to heaven?"

Her friend, startled, looked curiously in the earnest, upturned face.

"Why do you ask, Meta?"

"Oh, just because I think it's a very hard thing to understand, sir; and Johnny is going so soon that I want to find somebody else who knows the way."

"And who is Johnny? And what does he know about heaven?" asked Mr. Ascher, smiling down on her.

"Why, he is the poor little sick boy, that God has promised a new body! I forgot I had never told you, but I've been so busy since you came, you see." And she forthwith gave an account of Johnny: his hopes, his cheerfulness, his long sickness, and the beautiful things he had told her about the spiritual body to which he looked

forward with such confidence. "I just don't understand it all," she said, confidentially, "but Johnny is perfectly sure. He isn't a bit afraid of dying, and going down in the dark ground. I would be; wouldn't you, Mr. Ascher?"

But Mr. Ascher did not reply. His face was quite turned away from those eager eyes, and Meta, too earnest in her enthusiastic love for Johnny, did not stop to heed his silence, but continued her artless story.

"I asked him to tell me how to be good, too, and he did say a great many beautiful things; but I think it's mighty hard to believe what you can't see, don't you?"

"Very hard," assented her listener, his face still turned away.

"Then you don't think you could help me, do you?" she asked, doubtfully; "I mean, if I went with you, and staid with you until I grew to be a woman, could you help me to find out what Johnny means, and how he can be so glad to die, when I don't think I could without being so afraid? Oh, if you only could help me, I would so like to go with you to Europe."

The earnest tone made Mr. Ascher wince. He looked steadfastly down in the face, raised beseechingly to his, and his heart failed him. Could he dare to chill back these longings with

his own cold skepticism? to tell the child, who had so strangely interested him and completely won his love, that he had nothing but the world's wealth to offer her, *no* treasure laid up beyond the reach of moth or rust? Man of the world as he was, and long used to rejecting faith in God as well as in human nature, he had not the courage to answer those searching questions with the scoffing laugh, and proclaim his unbelief and ungodliness. But Meta gathered something of the truth from his silent, sorrowful gaze, and instantly a cloud fell upon the expressive face. Fearing to encounter the disappointed eyes, Mr. Ascher set himself to work to change the current of her thoughts; but she felt he was evading her, and a feeling of loneliness and regret prevented the ready speech, and made her, for once, a silent listener to the entertaining stories he told so well.

The feeling of intense disappointment made her very grave all through the quiet evening; and, though she did not leave Mr. Ascher's side, and tried to take the same interest in his charming flow of talk, she could not resist the conviction that, kind and good as he undoubtedly was, her friend was rejecting the one only way by which he could follow in Johnny's difficult footsteps, and enter into the joy of the Lord.

As the family laughed and chatted over their coffee, next morning, the dining-room door was suddenly burst open, and Meta rushed impetuously in.

"Oh, mamma," she cried, breathlessly, "Bridget is up-stairs! She has come for me to go and see poor Johnny! He's dying, she says, and asked for me. Oh, I am so very sorry, mamma!"

The child's head was laid on the mother's shoulder, and she burst into a passion of tears, sobbing convulsively as she finished the sad intelligence. Mrs. Wallace was startled and somewhat provoked. Would Mr. Ascher approve these plebeian tastes?

"Where is Bridget?" she asked, in some perplexity how to act. "This is the third or fourth time I have been deceived into believing the boy about to die. I'd better inquire into the facts, Meta; you are so very impetuous, remember!"

She arose to leave the room, looking very uncompromising; but before she reached the door, Meta seized Mr. Ascher's hands, and eagerly implored him to "beg mamma."

"I will go with you, and be your little girl," she pleaded; "I will do anything you want, if you will only make mamma say yes."

"But if I don't want you to come, just for Johnny's sake, what then?" he asked, gravely.

"Oh, you know it isn't that," she returned, reproachfully; "I do love you, and want to be your little friend, and to decide as mamma wishes; only I was afraid I cared too much about such things. Don't make me tell you now, for Bridget says we haven't much time. Oh, Mr. Ascher, if you will only ask mamma for me!"

Mrs. Wallace glanced uneasily at her visitor, as he hesitated an instant.

"Will you permit it?" he asked, gravely; "Meta has told me enough to make the boy quite an object of interest to me. I will accompany her if you like."

Seeing her cause so well espoused, Meta did not wait for her mother's spoken consent, reading in her eyes that permission was accorded, and ran out of the room in search of Bridget. But the girl was already gone. She had only left her brother at his repeated desire that Meta should be summoned for a last good-bye, and did not stay longer than was necessary to deliver the message and leave the address.

When Meta returned to her mother and Mr. Ascher, she found them talking of indifferent subjects, and even laughing as if nothing had

happened. Disappointed and indignant, she looked tearfully out of the window until the carriage was announced, shocked that her friend could so quietly hear the news of Johnny's speedy departure, while she was so greatly grieved. But when, during the drive, her hand was tenderly drawn through Mr. Ascher's arm, and held in mute expression of the sympathy he did not utter, she was comforted, and was encouraged to lean her head on the friendly shoulder to hide her tears.

CHAPTER XV.

THE winter sunshine streamed in through the open blinds, and Mrs. Hale's plain room fairly glistened with sunbeams.

Johnny no longer sat in the invalid chair, but lay in a little cot near the fire; his long, thin hands folded quietly over the snowy counterpane, and the black lashes on his poor cheek making the wan, pale face still more painful to see. Bridget sat at his side, wiping the moist forehead tenderly, and wetting the dry lips with water. Her face was inflamed with weeping, and her mouth quivered when Meta's affectionate caress recalled her from the sad task of ministering for the last time to the sweet, patient little sufferer she had so tenderly loved.

The opiates given for many days by the kind-

hearted doctor had clouded the last hours, though they had conquered the penalty of pain. The boy was only conscious at intervals, suffering comparatively little, and sleeping quietly through his last mortal experience. When he did arouse from the fast-growing stupor, it was with such a smiling, grateful face, as he thanked his untiring sister for some little attention, and with so much of his old, cheerful buoyancy, that he gave scant evidence of the near approach of death. His "patient continuance in well-doing" had brought already a reward of peace.

Though he had so earnestly desired to take leave of his little friend, he was not conscious of her coming for some time after the entrance of the party. Meta had buried her face in the bed-clothes, and was sobbing bitterly, when he awoke from his stupor for a few moments, and swallowed the stimulant that Bridget held to his lips.

"Oh, poor Johnny!" cried the child, involuntarily, as the fading eyes fixed themselves on her face.

A glad smile lighted up the dying features.

"No, not that," he said, slowly; "*rich* Johnny, happy Johnny, going home to his Father's kingdom! O Meta, I so longed to see you once more! I want you to see that He is faithful to

the end — to the end! You know the promise: 'I will never, no, never, no, never forsake.'"

Meta sobbed bitterly as the faltering accents reached her, and the sound of her grief seemed to cast a shadow over his triumphant face.

"*There*," he murmured softly to himself — "*there*, there will be neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain! Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory!"

The eyes were soon half closed, and he breathed quietly in a fitful slumber, again under the influence of the opiate. A long silence ensued, which no one cared to break. Mrs. Wallace, very uncomfortable at her near view of death and eternity, most anxiously waited an opportunity of rousing Meta without disturbing Johnny's slumber Mr. Ascher, curious and interested, was yet nervous. He had seen a great many people die, but this boy's death touched him strangely. After a long silence, when Mrs. Wallace had at last roused Meta's attention and motioned her to leave, Johnny again aroused. His faculties seemed more alive as the affectionate child bent over him, and he smiled as he stroked her hand.

"I have something here for you," he whispered; "something for you to keep when I am gone."

"The Bible, dear Johnny?"

"Yes, and more besides." Feeling under his pillow, feebly, he drew out a paper, written in large, unformed letters. "I've had it for you a long time," he said, in a low, weak voice; "I wrote it before I got so bad. Read me the precious promises once more!"

Meta took the paper, and tried to do as he requested; but her voice was too full of tears for reading. Turning beseechingly to Mr. Ascher, who stood near, she begged him to gratify poor Johnny, and again knelt down beside the cot. Mr. Ascher took the crumpled sheet, and, after glancing uneasily over the contents, read out slowly the following sentences, which the boy, with much labor, had written from time to time, as a legacy to his little friend:

"'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

"'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

"'Ye would not come unto me that ye might have life.'

"'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.'

"'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.'

"'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.'

"'He that hath the Son, hath life.' . . .

"'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.'

"'Be not faithless, but believing. . . . All things are possible to him that believeth.'

"'I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'

"'He that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.'"

There were many more sentences; but before Mr. Ascher had read these, Johnny had dropped off in another doze; and as he observed it, he handed the paper to Meta, and walked away.

"Hidden from the wise and prudent, yet revealed unto babes," thought Mr. Ascher, unconsciously condemning himself out of the Book whose claims he had so often and ingeniously disputed. "After all, is it not better to have this faith and die deceived, than live without hope, scoffing, faithless, yet condemned by the lips of innocent inexperience, and made to feel the fallacy of human judgment by the best refutation in the world — a dying bed made full of glory? Woe is me, if I do aught to implant my miserable, self-reliant pride in that sweet, faithful soul!"

Meta, at a motion from her mamma, kissed

the poor wasted hands, and whispered a tearful good-bye to Johnny; but the dull ears heard not.

Then they quietly stole from the room, followed by Mrs. Hale, who wished to see her visitors down-stairs; but Mrs. Wallace stopped her in the entry. The good woman was very sorrowful as she spoke of the child's goodness and the loss he would be to her lonely life.

"I never had child of my own, madam," she sighed, "and this poor lad has been like my own flesh and blood. Bless the boy! he's been a comfort and a help to me, in truth."

"Has he suffered much?"

"O ma'am, the like of it I never saw before; but he's bore it well, poor lamb!"

Mrs. Wallace took out her purse, and handed the woman a bill.

"To purchase what he may need," she said, as the nurse looked at her inquiringly.

"Ah! he'll not need much, nor long," sighed Mrs. Hale, sadly, as she gratefully thanked Mrs. Wallace, and went back to her vigils in the sick-room.

Once more in the fresh, keen air, Mrs. Wallace's spirits revived. She had been very much saddened and subdued by her visit to the dying boy, and, though pride had restrained her from

obeying the impulse she felt, of saying a few cheery words to the young journeyer, she had not felt less tender pity for him in her heart.

But, though touched and impressed by the scenes she had witnessed, her nature did not long retain serious impressions; and, after a few moments of sober thought, she laughed and chatted with Mr. Ascher as though nothing unusual had occurred.

Meta was very silent during the drive home, clutching Johnny's paper in her hand, as if some one were about to run away with her legacy, and pondering in the depths of her young soul the mysterious journey her little friend was about to take. As they drove along, she suddenly remembered that the precious gift, his own time-worn Bible, had been forgotten. She eagerly implored her mamma to turn back, but Mrs. Wallace assured her it was quite impossible, promising to send to Bridget for the book; and with this she was forced to be content.

The rest of the day passed drearily enough to the child, whose thoughts were all with Johnny; but Mr. Ascher, seeing her preoccupied state of mind, took her, after luncheon, for one of his famous walks, and was so loving and kind that she felt comforted. It was during this walk

that she confided her ignorance of the precise meaning of Johnny's sentences, though she meant to look for every one in her Bible, when she got it from Bridget.

"Johnny is one of Christ's lambs, isn't he, Mr. Ascher?" she asked, as they sat together in Union square.

Mr. Ascher replied, hesitatingly, "Yes, I suppose so."

At this, Meta drew out her paper, which she had safely stowed away in her pocket, and began to comment upon it in her own way:

"Do you know, sir, that Johnny wouldn't change places with a king? How can he be so certain that God will give him a new body, and wipe all the tears from his eyes? Who told him that everything in the Bible is true?"

Fortunately for Mr. Ascher, Meta's questions did not wait for answers, for he was at a loss what to say. He could not explain the undoubting faith of the sick boy, which was such a puzzle to him, nor could he bring himself to confess to his little friend that to him these sentences meant nothing and brought no convincing peace. He desired much to retain his place in her grateful love, yet dared not come between the young soul, struggling feebly into the light and knowledge of truth, and that faith so far

beyond his comprehension. And so, as all he could have said would only have added to her perplexity by fostering doubt, he said nothing.

When Meta found that the subject so engrossingly interesting to her was distasteful to her friend, she ceased to appeal to him, and sat very silent and thoughtful beside him.

"Well, little one," said Mr. Ascher, at length, "we must be going now. The air is too chill for you, and your mamma will think I am very thoughtless to keep you so long in these wintry winds. Tuck your cloak well about you, and let us start."

As they walked along homeward, very silently, Mr. Ascher, after a long pause, took the little hand in his, and pressed it affectionately.

"Meta," he said, gravely, "I am very sorry you cannot go with me to Europe, as I hoped—"

"But I don't know," she interrupted; "I think maybe you can help me better than anybody here! I do love you ever so much, and I want to go."

"I cannot take you," he replied, sorrowfully.

"Not take me? Oh, what have I done to make you angry with poor me? Don't you want me to be your little girl?"

"More than anything else in the world," he

said, very tenderly; "but I shall not take you, for all that. My poor little one, I have a sad story to tell you, but you must listen and forgive me. Meta, I am an unbelieving, worldly man, and have no hopes of that heaven you are so anxious to reach. I have not the courage to teach your young soul the bitter truths that I have found in life, and I dare not undertake to solve your doubts, when I have no faith myself!"

Mr. Ascher's voice was quite husky and unlike itself; but Meta, though she felt the change, never knew how much it had cost the proud heart to acknowledge to innocence and trust the unbelief it had never deplored till now. She was a little frightened, and a great deal concerned; but she could not divine his struggles, nor appreciate the motive that had bidden him renounce the dearest scheme of his heart through very fear.

"O sir," she exclaimed, half afraid of her own temerity, "O sir, don't you love God just a little? I think we might find the way together, if we only tried!"

The proud, self-reliant heart was greatly touched.

"My little girl," he said, brokenly, "I am an old man, and have seen long years of prosperity

and worldly gain, yet I have never thanked God for the least of his gifts. Do you think I could instruct you, when I know nothing myself? I might offer you of this world's treasure and joys, but oh, my sweet child, I can never help you to that faith you long to acquire, nor teach you one footstep in the difficult path you desire to tread. There is no hope of such things for me!"

Meta was awed by the confession. Could it be that her good, gentle, benevolent friend lacked the "one thing needful?" She had heard Johnny read of the great truth that there is but one door to the sheep-fold, and all who would enter must "come in thereat;" but she did not comprehend just then that neither gentleness, nor benevolence, nor all the virtues, availed aught unless founded on faith in that Christ whose "blood cleanseth from all sin."

In her childish sympathy, she set herself to comfort him, unfolding, in her frank attempts at consolation, that, so far as her own heart was concerned, she would gladly decide to accompany him; and revealing, too, by her confession of all her struggles, that, though groping in twilight shadows, the precious seed had taken deep root in her heart.

Mr. Ascher had never been so tempted. Her great tenderness and sympathy for his misfor-

tune in not being able to believe, and the warm affection so apparent in everything she said, made it very hard to thrust out from his lonely life this bright, happy child-nature, which he felt would influence him to good. But he had already decided the limit of his power, and resisted the yearnings he felt to take her to his heart, to be his one treasure among his kind, his own precious ewe lamb. Though it was very easy to convince the world that the advantages he could offer transcended any scruples he might have, yet in his inmost soul he knew better. Her lot had snares and pitfalls enough; she should not be tried beyond her strength by such a sight of the world and its pleasures as his wealth could procure her. He would not offer temptations; he dared not add a feather's weight to the struggling earth-bound spirit which so pined and longed to be free.

CHAPTER XVI.

GREAT was the astonishment of his host and hostess when Mr. Ascher announced his determination to leave the city at once, and declined the guardianship of the child, which he had been so very eager to assume.

"I owe you an explanation and apology," he said, regretfully, as Mrs. Wallace did not attempt to hide her annoyance; "I am exceedingly self-reproached for ever making the offer. The child's visible reluctance and my own sense of incompetency have decided me to decline the charge of my sweet little Meta. I trust to hear of her well-doing from time to time, and, as I am sensible how very vacillating, and even inexcusable, I must appear, I beg you will allow me to settle upon Meta, at once, such share of

my property as she would have received had all gone as I desired. Pray do not add to my regret by a refusal!"

But this proposition Mr. Wallace instantly and coldly rejected. "He had sufficient of his own to make ample provision for Meta," he assured Mr. Ascher, pointedly, "and was sorry he had ever countenanced the idea of separation."

The change in his host's manner was too marked not to be felt by Mr. Ascher; but, acknowledging inwardly the justice of Mr. Wallace's chagrin, he proceeded to inform them of his real reason for withdrawing his petition: "that further intercourse with the child had brought him face to face with such purity of soul, and such desire after holiness, that he felt he was no fit guardian for such a nature, and he dared not undertake the responsibility."

There was marked incredulity on both faces as he said this; Mr. Wallace giving him credit for some sinister motive, and Mrs. Wallace believing that Meta had herself destroyed her fortunes by some of her wild and eccentric ways.

Feeling that courteous unexpressed doubt was latent in the manners of both his friends, Mr. Ascher took leave, believing it would be

more agreeable to all parties if he took up his quarters at a hotel. Meta was very much surprised and full of sorrow when she learned that it was all over, and Mr. Ascher did not wish to take her, after all. She kissed him good-bye, after making him promise to come back after lunch the next day, for a drive in Central Park, and she watched the black beaver on its way down the street, until a blinding mist of tears quite hid her friend from view; then, running up-stairs to the nursery, she threw herself on the bed to cry out all her miserable feelings alone.

It was not long before she experienced the cost of being a little "dethroned queen." Now that there was no prospect of her going to Paris, and a very decided certainty that she would soon be at Mr. Leslie's school, she learned the truth of the proverb, "A miss is as good as a mile." Mr. Wallace having set the phrase going, it became a nursery lullaby from Félicie and Florry, that "Mr. Ascher was very impertinent," and his offer an unheard-of insult to a "man of papa's means." Meta angrily defended her friend from the ill-natured criticisms that now fell to his lot, but she was more chafed and fretted with her teasing room-mates than she had ever been before.

Precisely at four o'clock on the next afternoon, Mr. Ascher, true to his promise, drove up to the door for the promised drive; and Meta was in a flutter of excitement, keeping up an incessant flow of talk from the time they left until they returned at sundown. It would be tedious to relate all that occurred during that drive, for many serious subjects were discussed, and many promises made for the future. Meta was much grieved to learn that Mr. Ascher had taken passage for Liverpool in a steamer that would leave next day, and that this was the last she would see of her good friend for some years to come, as he designed remaining abroad an indefinite time. He did not even promise her many letters, confessing, with a rueful face, that he hated to write and had always been a very bad correspondent; so Meta drew a long sigh as she thought of this interminable absence that promised so little, and regretted intensely that she had ever refused to go; for had she not done so, there would have been no separation, and she would have pleased everybody, as well as herself. But it was too late to regret, now.

Just before the carriage turned into Thirty-fifth street, Mr. Ascher handed her a small paper parcel, tied with a cord, and requested

that she would see what he had brought her as a lasting reminder of his visit and friendship. She drew off her gloves and untied the bundle eagerly, and as she did so, a plain little book, showing the marks of long usage, fell in her hands: it was Johnny's Bible. She looked up, reproachfully:

"O Mr. Ascher," she said, in a grieved tone, "you have been to see Johnny, and never told me! I had so many things to ask you about him; but it's too late now, for we're almost at home."

"Yes, I have been to see Johnny," he replied, "and I have much to relate of my visit; but I did not wish our last drive together to be more sad than our parting has made it, so I have purposely waited to speak of your friend. Here we are, at home, sure enough, little one! You must wait until evening to ask those questions. Come, let me take your book and help you out!"

He spoke hurriedly, as if afraid of being questioned, and Meta followed him into the house without gratifying her longing desire to hear everything that was to be told. When they entered the drawing-room, they found it dimly lighted and deserted; Mrs. Wallace had not yet made her appearance, and Florry was out. Mr.

Ascher led Meta to a sofa, sat down beside her, and took her hand in both of his.

"My child," he said, tenderly, "I am going away from you to-morrow, and perhaps it may be forever; at least, it will be years before I return. Tell me now, while we are safe from interruption, are you willing to make me a promise?"

"Yes, anything you ask; only I am so very, very sorry you must leave me! O Mr. Ascher, I have not many friends; *don't* go!"

"But I could do you no good if I staid," he said, gently. "Believe me, dear Meta, that I value your friendship quite as highly as if you were not a child, and it is a great trial to me to place any obstacle to this pleasant intercourse; but my future is fixed, so far as this residence abroad is concerned. There are many good reasons that decided me to leave this country, though I will not tell them now; and all my arrangements have been made. Else, do you know, little girl, I think I would be too great a coward to go off and live alone, thrusting aside my sunbeam? But to my promise! Will you, when you have learned to follow Johnny's way — will you come to me then, and help me to find it? Or, if you cannot come, shall I return to you?"

"Oh, yes, a thousand times!" she cried, joyously, as if it would be an easy thing to find the narrow way. "Then you will come back soon?"

"I hope so," he smiled. "I trust you will not be long groping after the truth; and the sooner you find it, you know, the sooner we meet. One thing more! Give me one of those chubby hands a moment! Here is a little ring, very plain and inoffensive; yet if you look inside, you will find a word that means a very great deal. Here! let me slip it on, and do you never take it off, Meta, unless your fingers grow so much that it can't be worn. I have even provided against that, however, by getting it rather too large; so you must promise to wear it—"

"Indeed I will," she interrupted, eagerly; "and when one finger grows big, I can easily wear it on another."

"Just so," he said, laughing, "or even have it attached to a chain. Now, the word that you are puzzling over, though you didn't even ask to see it, is 'Mizpah.' Don't ask me what it means! You must look in Johnny's legacy for that. And now, have you nothing to ask about him, after all?"

"Ah! you know I have," she said, reproachfully, after thanking him earnestly for the

parting gift. Then ensued a tide of questions, which he found it difficult to answer: "Whether Johnny talked much, or if the doctor had made him any better; and wouldn't Mr. Ascher beg mamma, before he left, to let her go again to see him, if he lingered long?"

At this petition, he looked into the pleading face sorrowfully, and did not answer.

"He is dead!" she cried, a sudden conviction of the cause of his silence overwhelming her.

Mr. Ascher bowed his head in token of the truth.

"Tell me all about him — poor Johnny!" she said, bursting into tears. "Oh, was he frightened at last?"

"No, my little girl, he died very peacefully and quietly, a short time after I entered the room. He spoke only once, and then so low that I had to bend my head down to catch the words."

"What did he say?" she asked, brokenly.

"Only a short sentence, but full of faith and very touching," replied Mr. Ascher, turning away his face; "he said, 'He hath taken away the sting.'"

There was a pause after this, for Meta was sobbing bitterly, and Mr. Ascher's voice trembled too much for words.

At last her tearful face was raised.

"Did he send me this himself, and think of me even then?" she asked, anxiously.

"No, not just then, Meta. He had requested Bridget yesterday to send you the Bible, and she tells me there was a message written on the fly-leaf, at his dictation, by good Mrs. Hale."

Meta very eagerly opened the Bible to read his last message, but her tears blinded her, and she asked Mr. Ascher's assistance; so together they read these words:

"'Confess thy sin.'

"'Forgetting those things that are behind, press onward.'

"'In due time ye shall reap if ye faint not.'

"'He is faithful that promised.'"

As she took in the full meaning of these sentences, Meta became very grave and disturbed. To Mr. Ascher they meant nothing, and only surprised, inasmuch as the boy, out of the one only Book with which he was familiar, had so adapted its texts and familiarized them as to make them easy of comprehension to a child's mind. But to Meta it was a very message from the dead. "Confess thy sin" had in it all the solemnity of a command, and she had no doubt that it could only refer to that sin she had confided to him weeks ago, and which he had so earnestly ad-

vised her to reveal. The words rang in her ears, and entirely kept her from pondering the comfort contained in the rest of the sentences. She must first "confess," before she could "forget those things that are behind," else Johnny would not have so worded his message; and she saw her false reasoning, that had kept her silent, falling silently away and leaving her subdued and yet convinced, longing to take the first hard step, yet fearing, as she had always done, to reveal the long-hidden source of uneasiness. Once, as she silently reflected upon it all, she half resolved to tell Mr. Ascher, and be rid of it so far; but even while the good impulse battled with her coward heart, her mamma came into the room, followed by several ladies, and the opportunity was lost.

I will not detail the conversation she had with Mr. Ascher after dinner, since it was only to renew their compact of friendship. The drawing-room was very noisy, as Mrs. Wallace had many visitors; but this only made it easier to talk apart with her friend. Florry occasionally left the larger group, and sat down near the "old fogies," as she now called the pair; but, not finding the conversation very agreeable, she never staid long.

And so the evening passed away, and at the

end came that bitter parting; for Meta clung desperately to her friend's hand, and sobbed so vehemently that he was half inclined to let the steamship sail without him; but it could not be. Mrs. Wallace, who did not believe in sentiment, even in so childish a form, said it was quite absurd for Meta to be such a goose, and promised Mr. Ascher that, before he had reached the end of his voyage, Meta's violent affections would be transferred to her dolls.

"I am not afraid to trust her," he said, kindly, as he bent over the sobbing figure to press a kiss on the sweet face.

Meta caught his hand, and whispered something.

"I promised you," she said, beseechingly. "Oh, do, dear Mr. Ascher, promise me what I ask."

"If I can," he said, fondling the curly head.

"It is only this," hesitatingly; "you know you said you didn't love God. Oh, won't you please try?"

"I will try," he repeated after her, as he bade God bless her and keep her all the days of her life.

This was their parting. On the morrow, Mr. Ascher stood on the deck of the goodly ship, and looked his last for years on his native shores.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SHADOW had fallen upon Meta's life. She had learned the bitterness of parting in both its forms, and was very sad and unhappy. She had stepped from the pinnacle on which Mr. Ascher's regard had placed her, to the old stand-point of neglected childhood — had gone back to her every-day existence to endure teasing and snubbing, from the bright, beautiful world that friendship had made for her; and even her thoughts were tinged with the change. It was a very different thing to go listlessly to school with Florry, or to walk with Félicie, to those delightful drives with her friends; still harder and more trying, after being encouraged to talk of the inner life, and made to feel that she was a responsible being, to find her views called "peculiar," and her childish-

ness and lack of judgment perpetually sneered at. Meta was only like the rest of us: a little pampering of self-love and vanity goes a long way towards keeping down passions that are not called forth when we are petted and caressed. It is very easy to be amiable when we are never crossed; and so, she found, is the reverse quite as easy, when teasing and fretting at our foibles keeps them ever in mind, and only aggravates the evil.

Meta's first difficulty occurred on the day of Mr. Ascher's departure for England, when Bridget came for her to go to Johnny's funeral, and Mrs. Wallace resisted the tearful entreaties of both. The child protested, in her old, passionate way, that "mamma was a cruel mamma, and she wished she could die, too;" at which Bridget looked sorrowful, and Mrs. Wallace, saying contemptuously that "this was all the good her visits to Johnny had done, and they had better not have been made," ordered Félicie to take Meta to the nursery. Here she lay on the bed, in an agony of angry grief, for hours. When she had grown calmer, a feeling of intense mortification and sorrow filled her heart.

"Oh, if God should really grant her prayer, and let her die, what would become of her soul?

She wasn't fit to go where Johnny had gone, when everything made her so wicked, and she had almost hated mamma."

Then she took out her Bible, and opened it at Johnny's message. "Confess thy sin" looked still more terrible by daylight, and in her present state of awe and penitence; and when Félicie brought her dinner, she found her sitting on the rug, her face buried in the leaves of Johnny's book, crying dismally, all alone. The maid eyed her suspiciously as she drew near and set the plate on the table.

"What book is that?" she asked, rudely, trying to take it out of her hands. Meta did not answer, but sprang hastily by, and locked the Bible in her drawer, half afraid that the luxury of reading it would be denied her.

"*Mauvaise enfante!*" said Félicie, reproachfully; "you call madame ugly names, and hide books away in your lock drawer."

Meta had gone back to the fire, and did not make any reply; at which the girl vented her reproaches in French, and went away, slamming the door after her.

Things went on in this fashion for several weeks; at the end of which Meta was summoned to another interview in her mamma's dressing-room, and told that she would be sent in a few

days to her cousin's school. Mrs. Wallace had expected a rebellious outbreak, but Meta had grown indifferent to her fate, and offered no objection to the plan; seeing which, the mother was half inclined to take the little sorrowful girl to her heart, and try to understand her griefs. But she was so persuaded that the child needed other influences, and so used to repressing natural instincts in her heart, that the desire to comfort her little one was speedily overcome, and the sentence of banishment given. It was during this interview that she first saw Mr. Ascher's parting gift, and listened attentively to its history.

"My dear Meta," she said, in an annoyed tone, "is it possible you are so ignorant of propriety as to accept so valuable a gift without consulting me?"

"I didn't know it was valuable," she answered, meekly; "I remember he said it was a plain little ring."

"But it has a value, nevertheless, child; and if I did not think you would suffer by going away from us, I should insist on your returning it to Mr. Ascher, or at least laying it aside."

"O mamma, you couldn't be so cruel!" she cried out; "I promised him always to wear it, and I can't break my word! I didn't know it

was any harm to take it, mamma, indeed. Please let me keep my precious ring!"

"There, there! don't get so excited," said Mrs. Wallace, hastily; "I dare say it's not worth very much. Take it off, and let me see!"

But Meta assured her this was impossible, since she had promised to wear it; and then came out the story of the word engraved inside, which she had wanted so much to look out in her Bible, only she never could find the place. Would mamma help her?

"'Mizpah,'" said Mrs. Wallace, musingly; "let me see! Yes, it means something like this: 'The Lord watch between me and thee while we are parted, one from the other.' Who would have believed Joseph Ascher had so much religious sentiment! I must really tell papa, Meta. Did you know your paragon was as great an unbeliever as you could well find anywhere?"

Meta sadly assented as she turned the ring over on her finger thoughtfully. It was invested with a new charm now that it bore a prayer on the inside, and the possible loss of such a treasure made her tremble.

"I may keep it, dear mamma?" she asked, after a pause, throwing her arms around her

mother's neck, with little regard to the delicate laces that encircled it.

"I suppose so — yes, of course," replied Mrs. Wallace, as she disengaged the affectionate arms from her lace ruffles, and kissed the child's brow. "There, run away, little girl; mamma has an engagement with Mrs. Appleton now."

The day for Meta's departure was fixed for the end of that week, and she went about the house very sorrowfully to take leave of the old familiar things. Though she had made no demonstration when told of her separation from all she loved, she had not the less keenly felt the sentence. Now that Johnny was gone forever, and Mr. Ascher for so long, she had a feeling of loneliness and isolation hard to conquer; but home was home, after all, even if she was severely tried in her daily life, and she had a natural dislike to going among strangers. She was making early acquaintance with that disappointment of heart that so often "tracks the footsteps of Hope."

As soon as she felt sure that there was no appeal from mamma's sentence, she ran over to Agneau's to say good-bye. It was the first time she had visited her humble friends since Johnny's death, and the sight of her familiar

face created quite a stir in the shop. François came eagerly around the counter to bid her welcome, and old Agneau, looking over his spectacles, smiled pleasantly, and made a polite French bow. She sat down on one of the high stools, and began an eager conversation with François, who told her he had often visited Johnny for her sake, and had attended the plain funeral, giving her the details of all: how they had dressed the boy in a new suit, and carried him to a big cemetery; how the nurse and Bridget had wept and moaned, and the man who filled in the grave "reckoned it was all for the best;" how he, François, had laid a bunch of flowers on the grave that very morning; for he had learned to love Johnny, and would take Meta to see the place any day she could obtain madame's consent.

"I can't ever go," said Meta, sadly, her eyes filling with tears; "I am going ever so far in the country to live in a big school, and I have come to say good-bye."

François, in a jargon of French and English, expressed great regret, and asked many questions. Then Meta begged him to take a message to her "dear Bridget," and to give her best love to Alice, who was not at home; and then, jumping down from her high perch, said she

must certainly go, or Félicie would be very angry indeed.

François made his adieux tearfully, and old Agneau opened his heart, and presented a large bundle of caramels as a parting gift, assuring mademoiselle that he deeply regretted her loss.

As Meta hurried along the avenue, she saw her old acquaintance, the tambourine girl, holding out that instrument beseechingly to the passers-by. She had on a good pair of shoes, and was altogether quite improved since their last meeting. The monkey was hopping about on the pavement, looking very queer in his red-flannel vestments, and still winking his eyes like a sage. When the Italian recognized our little friend, he stopped grinding, in the middle of a tune, to make a flourishing bow, and smile his acknowledgments of former favors.

"Oh, I haven't any money," cried Meta, as he drew near; "but here are some nice caramels!" and, throwing the bundle in the tambourine, she ran off.

That night, while sleepily preparing for bed, Félicie came with a summons to her mamma, which Meta obeyed in a tired, reluctant way. She had scarcely entered the dressing-room door, when she was clasped in a pair of sturdy arms, and Bridget's cheery voice greeted her.

"And it's going away, ye are, my deary? My heart is sore heavy at the thought. What'll poor Biddy do without one of her darlints?"

Mrs. Wallace, who was moved at the woman's love for her child, here softly withdrew, leaving the two to talk over their sorrow together.

"It can do no harm, now," she thought, "but I was very foolish ever to have allowed it to go on."

Meta and Bridget had much to say to each other, and they made the most of their time. Johnny's last hours were long dwelt upon, and after the sister had tearfully related the sufferings, and yet the perfect faith, of her darling, she told the little girl that he had left her a few words of warning and comfort.

"He bid me tell ye," she said, looking intently in the child's face, "that ye must be of stout heart to do right, and not forget what he told ye do the day ye ran away with the Frinch lad to see him. D'ye remember?"

"Yes," said Meta, sorrowfully; "are you very sure he said that? for it's mighty hard to do."

"Indeed, and I'm sure, Meta. Them's the words my Johnny said. And won't you tell your own Bridget what's worriting the darlint? Sure, ye're going among strangers, and ye'd best tell me all. No? You can't find courage,

my honey? Then never mind, Meta, my lamb; do ye just follow Johnny's advice, and ye'll not go far astray! And now I must be off, darlint, for Brooklyn's not at the corner, and your mamma'd not be pleased an' I staid too long. God bless you, my own baby!"

Bridget here delivered herself of a series of hugs, and wept silently awhile before she could find it in her heart to break away from "her baby," who clung so passionately to her neck. But Mrs. Wallace's entrance, and the restraint it brought, dried her tears.

As soon as Bridget closed the door, Meta ran to her mamma, and hid her face in her lap. The long-pent-up grief at leaving home and every thing she loved vented itself in wholesome tears on a mother's breast.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the evening before her departure, Meta stole softly at twilight to her father's library, and gave a low knock at the door. Faint as the sound was, the knock was immediately answered, and, before she had time to hesitate, the door was opened, and her father stood before her, looking down curiously at the little figure. Johnny's first sowing of good seed was bringing a speedy harvest. His message had sunk deep in her heart at first, and for the last few days she had thought of little else, trying to believe it possible to "forget those things that are behind," and yet not confess, but finding it impossible to expect the blessing if she did not first experience the pain. Whether designedly or not, the boy had so worded his sentence that she never took out

her Bible for comfort that "Confess thy sin" did not bring to mind what lay heavy on her conscience; and she grew into a superstitious belief that she would never succeed in her efforts to be good, if she neglected the boy's warning.

Bridget's visit and Johnny's last advice, together with her regret at leaving home, had all worked slowly to decide her; and she had resolved that she could never bear the separation from her father, or the loneliness of the new life, if there was anything worse than parting to endure.

"What do you want, Meta?" was her father's first question, after bidding her enter and handing her a chair. Meta did not sit down, but stood nervously before the table, covered with pamphlets and papers, at which her father had seated himself.

"I have something very naughty to tell you, papa," she said, playing with an end of her apron.

"What is it, little one? Have you broken something, or torn your best dress? You'd better go to mamma, dear!"

"Oh, no, papa, nothing like that! This happened very long ago at Bellevue."

"At Bellevue?" repeated Mr. Wallace, be-

coming interested; "and what was it so very naughty, Meta?"

With a desperate effort, and struggling vainly against her tears, she told the whole story. Mr. Wallace listened very gravely as the revelation was made. One of his pet hobbies had always been that, since the children were forbidden ever to enter the library, at either residence, it mattered very little in what condition his papers were left; and he was, consequently, extremely careless. He had missed this very paper when making an inventory of his property, in view of a new will, on the day of Mr. Ascher's arrival, and had purposed going to Bellevue to look it up; but his friend's visit had not only postponed the trip, but entirely obliterated the loss from his mind; and as he was a genuine procrastinator, even the new will was still in an unfinished state. As Meta's tale progressed, he gave way to various emotions. Annoyance at the child's heedlessness, self-reproach for his own carelessness, wonder at the influence that had brought the thing to light, and an affectionate sympathy for the poor little penitent, filled his heart. A pang of self-reproach for her unloved childhood smote him, too. What had he ever done to make the spring-time of life joyous to her, or to sow the good seed she had found by

the wayside? Her very artlessness and queerness went to his heart as he sat silently stroking her hand. Though fearing it was the missing paper she so confusedly avowed she had swallowed, he still hoped it might be valueless as he asked the question:

"Was there any name, Meta?"

"Yes, papa," in a despairing tone, "it was my dear, good Mr. Joseph Ascher."

Mr. Wallace, at this confirmation of his fears, thrust aside the hand he was stroking, and took a few strides down the room. After looking out of the window a few moments, and giving a philosophical whistle, he came back to his chair, and set Meta on his knee.

"O papa," she cried, despairingly; "what have I done? what have I done?" And she clasped her hands, feeling sure it was something very dreadful, indeed.

"We are both to blame, my dear," said her father, after a pause; "but though I am sorry for your distress, I must severely reprimand your thoughtlessness. You have swallowed just exactly five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand dollars!" repeated the little girl in a tone of horror; then she gave way to a fit of overwhelming grief.

"Yes," pursued Mr. Wallace, "the paper you

swallowed was a note from Mr. Ascher for that amount."

"A note, papa? Couldn't he write another?"

"Yes," reflectively; "he could do that; but then, Mr. Ascher is far away, you know—"

"O papa," interrupted the voice, brokenly; "if I had only told you before Mr. Ascher left!"

"Ah, Meta, if you had, there would have been no serious trouble, you see! Concealment is very dangerous, and I hope you will profit by your experience of it. You did very wrong to disobey my wishes, in going at all into the library, and then to gratify your temper by destroying the evidence of your fault; but you have done far worse to keep it so long concealed."

"I wasn't quite sure, papa," she pleaded, humbly, "that the paper was really valuable. It was out on the desk, and looked so old, and —"

"Don't hunt up excuses!" interrupted her father, somewhat nettled that his own carelessness was coming in for a share of the blame; "it is very cowardly to seek escape from the just punishment of our evil acts; don't you know that?"

"Yes," she said, penitently; "but I did not mean any harm — I didn't think —"

"That is just what we are all prone to say when we have been very thoughtless, little girl! Shall I tell you a nice verse you would do well to learn? Listen, and remember it, Meta:

> Evil is wrought by want of *thought*
> As well as want of heart.

Thoughtlessness is no sort of plea to urge when you have done wrong, for it is a wrong in itself. Think of the number of people who might have been made happy by the sum you so carelessly made away with!"

"Oh, can't anything be done? I'll ask Mr. Ascher to write it over again!"

Mr. Wallace smiled.

"Listen attentively, Meta," he said, "and I will tell you a story about that paper. Long ago, when your friend was a poor man, and left my office to start for himself in the West, I offered to lend him a considerable amount of money, and, after some hesitation, he agreed to accept the favor. I was very fond of your Mr. Ascher; he had been my confidential clerk for years, and I was very anxious to assist him in his manly notions of independence. In a few years he paid me half the original sum loaned — do you understand what I am saying?"

"Oh, yes, papa, every word of it! That paper told about it all, I reckon!"

"No, not exactly, but it was Mr. Ascher's promise to pay me, after a specified time, the rest of the money, with interest from the date of the loan. Now, I have no proof, you see, of the transaction, Meta. Mr. Ascher's note having been made a meal of, I can only rely upon his honor; and though I do not question that at all, yet the ocean is wide, life is short, and wealth may disappear in a twinkling—"

"O papa," sighed Meta, despairingly.

"Besides," he continued, "no one knows of the existence of that paper but your friend and myself — ah, I forgot! you have crept into the secret, too! See what an important person you have made of yourself! And now, Meta, let this be a lasting lesson to you; and remember that, though I am a rich man, I am not proof against bankruptcy if you take a fancy to swallowing many notes for five thousand dollars at a meal!"

Finding that her father was again smiling, Meta took heart and smiled too. In fact, Mr. Wallace, while talking, had convinced himself that it was not such an irremediable piece of mischief, after all. The ocean might be wide, and life uncertain, but it seemed scarcely prob-

able that either *his* wealth or *his* life could be in jeopardy; and he comforted himself, as well as the child, with the assurance that he would write to Ascher shortly, and the matter would be satisfactorily arranged.

In the midst of Meta's grateful thanks for her father's kindness, the dressing-bell rang, and she was hurriedly dismissed with an affectionate caress and a full assurance of pardon. There was one part of the story that Mr. Wallace had not deemed it necessary to tell; but Meta knew nothing of this, and went "on her way rejoicing" at the weight lifted from her heart.

For some time, it is true, she did reflect upon the vast amount of happiness such a sum might procure, and of the danger of trifling with unknown papers; but the relief from her long-endured struggles to confess was so great that she very soon comforted herself with the belief that it would all be made right when papa wrote to Mr. Ascher. The sin having been confessed, she might now hope to "forget those things which are behind," and take the next step in Johnny's pathway.

In the bustle of departure, and the tearful leave of her parents and home, Meta forgot everything but her own sadness of heart, and

dismissed all thought of the paper from her mind; nor did she trouble herself about the matter afterwards, until years had passed, and subsequent events brought the scene in her father's library vividly to her recollection.

Mr. Wallace had promised in good faith, and had intended to write, within a few days, to Mr. Ascher, explaining the loss of his note; but he had been too long a procrastinator to change his habits at once, and the letter was never written at all.

CHAPTER XIX.

SEVERAL weeks passed, and Meta was sufficiently initiated into the mysteries of school life to be very homesick, and weary of the routine. She longed to go back to New York, and be free to follow her inclinations again: to take a run over to Agneau's and chat with François; to ride out with her mother and Florry, or even to quarrel with Félicie. Anything seemed preferable to the dull monotony and weariness of her changed life. The girls were strangers, and possessed of all the curiosity of their class, vexing her with inquiries into her past existence and her tastes, teasing her for her awkwardness among the self-possessed young women who had seen something of the world, and, worse than all, laughing at her serious turn of mind, and dubbing her

META STUDYING. Page 166.

"Saint Margaret" for daring to quote from Johnny's sentences when her religious views were called in question.

All this was perplexing and very hard to bear; she found Johnny's pathway narrow and thorny enough to cause many tears in trying not to forsake it. The bell that roused her from a comfortable morning nap, to hurry on her clothes, seemed the cruelest of sounds. She missed Félicie's dexterous fingers, and made sad work with her curls and collars; for she had never performed such offices for herself before. The long refectory, with its rows of tables, seemed like a court of justice, before which she must answer to the charge of never having been to a boarding-school. There were no longer Swiss rolls and appetizing relishes for breakfast, but only her share of the substantial country fare, which she found very unlike that to which she was accustomed, and not at all to her taste. She missed, too, Agneau's fancy confectionery. There were village stores, where candy of an antiquated build and taste was offered for sale; but at such Meta turned up her nose, and would not deign to eat. On the whole, her first experience of a boarding-school — or, as Mr. Leslie's more aristocratic establishment was termed, a *Pensionnat des Demoiselles* — was anything but agreeable.

Mr. Leslie and his amiable wife, though nominally the principals of the school, had nothing whatever to do with its management. A strict Frenchwoman and a large corps of under-professors virtually ruled, while Mr. Leslie was financial manager, and his wife devoted herself entirely to the household department.

Madame Seville, under whose jurisdiction the girls were placed, was rather too much given to partiality to be just; yet, on the whole, was somewhat a favorite with her scholars. One of her eccentricities was to be always complaining of headache, or some other bodily ill, which made it necessary for her to drink fragrant coffee and eat tender steaks at her end of the table, the choice morsels being hungrily watched by the girls, who were faring so differently. Yet, to judge by her ruddy face and round figure, madame needed very little to sustain her, and one would never have suspected that she was altogether so great an invalid as she supposed. Mrs. Leslie provided amply for her young charges, but it was rather tempting to see madame's private meals so greatly relished; and notwithstanding that there were other substantials presented to them, so long as madame dipped into the "flesh-pots of Egypt," the scholars longed to do likewise.

One Saturday morning, Meta stood on the back piazza, looking disconsolately down upon a merry group in the yard who were busy at a game of croquet, too homesick and miserable to join them. She had been nearly a month in the school, and, though her shyness had somewhat worn off, still held herself aloof from her companions, earning by the indulgence of natural timidity the character of a "reserved, stuck-up piece," in the language of the boarders. She had borne the inquisitorial process to which new scholars are subjected very patiently; but when her cousin Julia, her room-mate and would-be friend, made her the subject of a witty sketch, laughing at her for reading Johnny's Bible, and teasing her unmercifully for pretensions to saintliness, her old temper was roused. This morning some very ill-natured remark had kept her from the croquet ground, and fostered the angry spirit she had hoped was under control. She was anxious to join the group in the yard, yet would not, because she felt her wayward passion could not be restrained if she was greeted with the hateful title of "Saint Margaret," and this she knew would be the case.

She was almost ready to cry, when an interruption, as unexpected as it was unwelcome, came in the shape of Madame Seville. The

teacher noiselessly approached, and laid a fat hand on the curly head.

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked madame, soothingly, catching sight of the miserable face. Meta shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing.

"Poor little girl, you are homesick! Come with me! Have you had your breakfast?"

"I had some bread and milk," said Meta, sighing; "I did not care for anything else."

"And you don't call that breakfast, I suppose," said madame, laughing at her tone; "come with me, and I will see what I can find to add to the bread and milk."

The little girl reluctantly obeyed, and followed madame through a good many passages to a small room overlooking the lawn. The morning sunshine streamed in through the pretty muslin curtains, a canary sang merrily in the window, a bright fire burned in the grate, and altogether it was as cheery and inviting a little chamber as one could well desire. Meta felt more at home than she had done since her arrival, as she took the nice cushioned chair to which madame invited her, and leaned back at her ease; while her teacher bustled about the room, moving a book here, and changing the fall of her curtains, feeding the canary with

sugar, and talking all the while with true French volubility. There were several large, rosy apples on the mantel-piece, which she took down and handed to Meta, bidding her eat them if she liked; then, seating herself in a rocking-chair, she began questioning her young visitor pretty much as the girls had done, finding great amusement in the queer answers she received, as Meta unwittingly opened her heart.

"Let me see," said madame, after a long talk; "I believe I have heard Julia Leslie speak of you. She is your room-mate, isn't she? And you are the very little girl they have all been talking about."

The brown eyes looked up inquiringly, and then drooped.

"I don't know what Julia could have said about me," said Meta, her good-humor about to vanish.

"Only that you put yourself to sleep every night with Bible verses," replied madame, smiling. "There! don't be provoked with your cousin; it was nothing very bad to say, I am sure!"

A quick, vivid blush mantled the child's face. Could it be that Julia had really heard her repeating the dear sentences to herself when she fancied everybody asleep and she was *so* heart-

sick and miserable? The little hands were clasped tightly, as her eyes filled with passionate tears. Madame Seville, unconscious of the pain she was inflicting on the sensitive nature, so keenly alive to ridicule, and knowing nothing of Meta's new title or the girls' sneers, went on in the same strain to confirm the child's fears that her sufferings had really been made a subject of jest, and her one comfort — Johnny's legacy — laughed at by her heedless cousin. The old leaven rose in her heart as she listened, clasping and unclasping her hands in excitement, but saying not a word of all she felt.

Madame, who was sorry to see her so soon the object of school-girl ridicule, thought she would venture upon a piece of advice.

"It is very well, my dear," she said, kindly — "very well to cultivate your pious inclinations; but let me beg you to keep them to yourself in future. These heedless girls have no sympathy with anything above their own level, and you will never be popular if you even seem to be better than your companions."

"I don't want to be popular!" cried Meta, passionately; "I don't pretend to be good, either! I never was good; I was only trying! Oh, I wish I was back at home, and away from all these cruel people — "

Sobbing vehemently, Meta could get no further; but, throwing her apples down on the table, she ran out of the room before madame had recovered from her surprise at the strange result of her well-meant advice.

Too indignant and too proud to appear before the girls in tears, Meta checked her sobs as she sped along the passages, out into the yard, and into the midst of the game of croquet. The girls who were playing had reached the close of the contest, and were in a state of clamorous excitement, their voices mingling in so many keys of reproach, triumph, and discomfiture, as various blows decided the game, that the uproar was extreme. Meta rushed in among the balls, regardless of the exclamations from all sides.

"Get out of my way!" cried Julia, excitedly. "I can't see that wicket, and I mean to go right through to the stake!"

But before the boast was well out of her mouth, Meta confronted her.

"You are a cruel, dishonorable girl," she said in a low voice, her eyes flashing.

"Heyday!" said the astonished Julia, pausing to take aim; "I believe you've lost your wits, Meta Wallace."

"No, I haven't," returned her cousin, still in a very low tone; "you know I am telling the

truth! You have spied on me and told all about me, and I think you are very mean and cruel!"

"Meta Wallace," cried Julia, in a tone that all could hear, "I used to think you were very pious; but I do declare, you're the greatest little termagant I ever saw! Nobody likes story-tellers, I can tell you! We're not used to it here!"

"Oh, for shame, Julia!" cried several voices, deprecatingly.

"I mean just what I say!" answered Julia, turning sharply and defiantly around on the group. "Meta knows very well that she's always singing psalms and saying her prayers, and now she's ashamed to own it." And Julia, laying a heavy hand on Meta's shoulder, shook her finger scornfully in her face.

With blind, angry gestures Meta strove to release herself from her cousin's grasp; and in the struggle that ensued, Julia backed over the croquet wicket, bruising herself slightly, and putting a sudden termination to the dispute. When she arose, scowling at Meta, the girls crowded around her with offers of sympathy; and, though it had not been Meta's fault at all, on her shoulders came all the weight of displeasure. The croquet party, angry at the in-

terruption to their game, and siding with Julia, who vehemently declared "she was dead, and Meta had killed her," were pouring out their wrath, when Madame Seville, who had followed the child, came suddenly on the scene.

"Sallie Owens," said madame, addressing a tall, handsome girl, the idol of the school for cleverness and daring, "Sallie Owens, tell me the cause of this disturbance. I am really ashamed of you, girls."

Poor Meta's case had fallen into bad hands; for Sallie was madame's acknowledged favorite, and Julia's stanchest friend.

"What it means, madame?" quoth the young lady, indignantly, looking contemptuously at Meta. "It's an exhibition of religious fervor: a display of Saint Margaret's temper. She gives lectures on Christian patience, and this is the way she demonstrates them. I always hated saintly people, and now I am sure they hide claws!"

There was a general laugh at this display of smartness, and Sallie looked complacently at madame, evidently conscious of her power. Madame did not smile at the pleasantry, yet did not rebuke it.

"Have *you* anything to say?" she said, turning to Meta.

"Not here," replied the child, sorrowfully; her temper all gone, and intense mortification at this public disgrace filling her heart. Though conscious that she had really not acted the part so volubly given to her in Julia's excited account of her fall, she sensibly felt how much cause she had given for sneers when her practice had been so different from her creeds. Bitterly she regretted that she had not remonstrated with her cousin when she was in a better frame of mind; and though she was conscious of still being roused at the injustice of her position, she was too mortified and self-condemned to clear herself in madame's eyes. It was a lesson of self-control learned so long ago that it was not so hard to restrain herself as it would seem.

Madame, with a few cutting reproofs, dismissed the party to their several apartments. This would have been a great relief to Meta but for the difficult position she was in; for Julia, being her room-mate, was just then in a frame of mind to be very trying, and sufficient punishment in herself. Meta would have gladly apologized when they were alone, but Julia would not hear of it. She was not conscious of how far she had been unjust and untruthful, and, while trying to make good her case to mad-

ame, had succeeded in convincing herself that Meta had done something very bad, and *she* had behaved with great forbearance and discretion. It was very gratifying to her angry feelings that she had the sympathy of the whole party, and she wrapped herself in her dignity, and refused to be won over by anything her cousin could say.

If Meta had not gone through such training in Félicie's hands, it is to be questioned whether she could have stood the tirade as long as she did. To her great relief, madame, who feared something of this kind, after a while sent for her to come out in the garden, where she proposed joining her in a short time. Meta joyfully took her hat, and left Julia to her own reflections, preferring madame's probable lecture to her cousin's wrathful reproaches.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Meta reached the garden and entered the pretty arbor, covered with its first green leaves of spring, a feeling of refreshment and relief came over her. Everything was so peaceful, and the air was so fresh and cool, that she could scarcely believe she had been through such turmoil so lately.

The sight of a large chair, with wheels at the side, just within the arbor, made her suddenly step back. She had seen the chair before, and knew that the occupant was Mrs. Leslie's invalid sister, Miss Clifton, who was to be seen wheeling herself along the garden paths every pleasant day. Meta had often wondered why she never walked, and several times had made up her mind to join the groups of girls around the chair during recess; but she had never

done so, and would have drawn back now, but a sweet voice called out to her to stay. Timidly she came forward, taking the delicate hand held out to her, and sat down on the rustic bench against which the chair rested. Since her introduction to Miss Clifton, this was the first time she had ever been thrown with her, except when surrounded by school-girls; and a feeling of awe and embarrassment took possession of her. But the invalid's voice was so kind, and her fair, placid face had something in it so fascinating, that Meta was soon glad she had come.

"Madame Seville has been here," said Miss Clifton, after her companion had become somewhat at her ease; "and I persuaded her to send you to me, my dear. I have had some experience in these matters, and they do not weary me as they do poor madame, who has so many cases to settle. I felt sure there was some mistake about it, and now you are to tell me just how *you* saw the matter; for you know, my dear, we do not all see things in the same light."

Looking earnestly in the kind face, Meta involuntarily drew nearer Miss Clifton's chair, and laid her hand in the delicate, outstretched palm. A wistful expression in the child's eyes made the invalid draw Meta's head over on her shoulder, where she soon found courage to tell her story,

not without remorsefully dwelling upon her hasty temper, and her hopes that she would learn how to govern her spirit some of these days, "if she only tried hard." As she went on in her recital of all the provocation Julia had offered, yet without exonerating herself, Miss Clifton was surprised to find how persistent and anxious her little penitent was to follow in the way Johnny had pointed out. Of course, Johnny and Bridget, and, indeed, all of Meta's life was revealed to the sympathizing listener during the long interview; and before it came to an end, the little girl was thoroughly at home and very cheerful with her new friend.

"I am so glad madame sent me to you," said Meta, confidentially; "I didn't know you were so nice. I used to be afraid to speak —"

"I suppose because of this formidable chair," smiled Winny; "I am afraid it has frightened away a good many little girls with their troubles to somebody else."

Meta looked as if she very much wished to ask something about the chair, but she did not like to question Miss Clifton. Her expressive face, however, was so inquiring that the invalid divined her thoughts.

"You are wondering why I never leave my chair?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes, I am," said Meta; "it seems very comfortable, but don't you get tired sometimes?"

"Not often, dear, for I have grown accustomed to my confinement, and seldom think of it as a deprivation. You see, my hands are kept busy, and I have the comfort of moving about after a fashion; then, so much that was needful and beautiful, too, has come to my life since I was first cut off from greater usefulness, that I have no need to repine. Do you want to know why I never walk? When I was a school-girl like yourself, I had a very severe fall on the ice, which so injured my knee that I have never moved without assistance since."

"Oh, how dreadful!" exclaimed Meta; "do you mind telling me about it, Miss Clifton?"

"I seldom speak of it," she returned, gravely, "as it was a very painful part of my life; but I trust you will profit by my experience. My accident occurred during a winter holiday, when a large skating party was formed, and we went down to the pond, a crowd of laughing, heedless girls, ready for a grand frolic. Among my companions was one who held the same position that Sallie Owens does here; she was a gay, clever, daring girl, whom we all felt proud to follow in whatever she proposed, no matter how wild the folly. I was her chosen friend; and as

I never ventured to oppose her in anything, we were extremely devoted to each other. Our only cause of rivalry was skating, for we were both well-drilled and perfectly fearless; so, after a time, it became an acknowledged fact in the school that we were so well-matched that, though the girls took sides violently, no one could decide which was the better skater of the two. On this day, the absurd spirit of rivalry had taken possession of our followers, and nothing would satisfy them but a race, that the oft-disputed question of our merit might be decided upon. To this Alice and I readily agreed, and after some parley the race began. The result was so exactly the same every time we ran the allotted space, there being no visible difference in the time made, that we were soon involved in an eager dispute, and a great many ill-natured things were said on both sides. When we took our stand for a last trial, Alice and I were both very much excited. I saw that she looked tired and provoked; but a sneering remark just before starting roused my pride and anger, and I did not offer, as I had intended, to put it off till the next holiday, as we were not equally matched. I felt so strong and sure of success, that, as we moved along swiftly, I could not forbear laughing gayly. A twig sticking up through

the ice had turned Alice's course a hair's-breadth, and a loud shout from my partisans moved me to wave my handkerchief in token of triumph as I prepared to dart by; but Alice was too quick for me. Before I could reach the bank she had recovered her position, and darted across my path with sudden energy, throwing me off my balance, in the very teeth of victory, and I fell heavily on the ice. I did not recover consciousness for several minutes, and, when I did so, found myself lying on the bank, a crowd of scared faces looking into mine, and my hands being vigorously chafed. I was carried to the house, for every movement made me scream with agony; and since that day I have never walked. My knee was injured for life, and nothing could be done."

"And Alice?" cried Meta, breathlessly. "Oh, didn't you hate her all your life?"

"The suffering made me very weak and wicked, my dear. For months I groaned at my fate, and refused to be comforted, cherishing very bitter feelings towards Alice, notwithstanding her vehement grief and despair. But time changed all this, and I have long since ceased to blame my old friend. We have had many tearful talks about it all, for she was never the same after my accident, blaming herself in

a morbid way, and never losing the sting of self-reproach. But we have been dear friends in spite of my unkind and cruel rejection of her in those first days of pain and despair."

"I am afraid I would have hated her," said Meta; "I am afraid I would never have let her come near me again."

"Ah! that is because you rely on your own strength! Do you suppose I could have conquered my revengeful, unforgiving spirit if I had depended on myself? You must learn to look above for strength to overcome sinful nature, else you cannot hope to claim the promise, 'In due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not.'"

This was new doctrine to Meta; she was going a step further in Christian experience.

"But if I keep looking above, and don't try myself, how can I ever be good?" she asked, in a puzzled tone of voice.

Miss Clifton could not forbear smiling.

"If you keep your heart fixed above, Meta, and yet try your utmost, you will follow both my idea and your own; will you not? For instance: it seems very hard to you that I am unable to go about like the rest of you; yet, by God's blessing, this is to me no longer a great trial. I am very happy in my narrow sphere of

usefulness, and am removed from many temptations that might have proved a snare to my weak heart. God knows what is best for his creatures, and I am ready to do his will, thankful that 'He who knows me best shall choose for me.' Didn't you tell me that Johnny was comforted with the hope of a new body? So am I, dear Meta. Think of me as I shall be then, not as I am now!"

Miss Clifton's face beamed with faith and joy as she spoke, and Meta looked very wistfully at the radiant expression in her sweet eyes.

"Don't you think," she said, slowly, after a pause — "don't you think if my back was crooked, or somebody broke my leg, I would find it easier to be good?"

"Oh, no," laughed Miss Winny; "God gives to every seed its own body. You would not be a better Christian in a way of your own choosing. God knows just how far you can be tried, and what is the salvation of one soul may be hurtful and a drawback to another. So, after all, dear, we come back to the first standpoint: trust in him. He knows the end, we do not; and what may seem to you an easier road might prove a delusion and a snare."

"But, Miss Winny, you and Johnny are the best people I ever saw, and yet you can't walk. I was never sick in my whole life —"

"Don't say it so repiningly," interrupted her friend, in earnest reproach; "that is a great blessing, and not to be received without thanks. God has not chosen to send you bodily trials, but you must not reject the spiritual. Shall I tell you how it strikes *me?* There is far greater glory in governing the heart than in enduring physical suffering. The martyr bares his head for the axe, knowing that with one fleet mortal throe he gains the company of his God and the angels, and he can bid his coward heart take courage; but to conquer one's spirit, bridle the hasty tongue, and live in the world, exposed to its countless temptations and crosses, yet above the trivialities of human life, seems to me a higher kind of sacrifice, that brings its own great reward."

"I think you are right, though I don't believe I know all you mean," sighed Meta; then, after a pause, "do you know, Miss Winny, I pray to be given a new heart, and I try to do as Johnny said; but I still get very angry, and say wicked things all the time when I am crossed. Can it be I am too young for God to help me?"

"Oh, no, my poor little one!" exclaimed Miss Clifton, earnestly; "you must not be afraid of that. Take comfort in the invitation to little children to come unto him, and never believe

that your desires to do right are not all noted in his Book of Life. Human friends may misjudge us, but God never will."

Here madame's sharp black eyes looked in on the two.

"So," she said, panting, and out of breath; "so! I am very glad to see, mademoiselle, that you have Meta in charge, and seem to be getting on so well with her case! It is a very different expression to the one she wore on the croquet ground. Come, little lady, let me hear your account of yourself!"

"Nay, madame," interposed Miss Winny, seeing that Meta's shyness was coming back under the new influence; "if you will only let me dismiss the plaintiff, and give my own version of her cause, I shall feel that I am doing some good to the Commonwealth."

To this proposition madame consented after some hesitation, dismissing Meta with an injunction to be very careful of her temper in future, and above all not to provoke her cousin to wrath, should she not have recovered composure. Meta ran off very much relieved, and was soon engrossed with a party of eager croqueters, who besieged her before she reached the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEXT in school authority to Madame Seville ranked Monsieur Jean, the master of languages and music. A queer little Frenchman was Monsieur, full of eccentricities, and held in great awe among the girls, yet gifted with a benevolent affection for everybody and everything that was too weak to stand up for itself. He had been known to pet a number of poor worthless dogs whose masters cast them out upon the world; not that he liked the miserable-looking objects, but that they were being beaten and cuffed about for their ugliness, and this he could not endure. Monsieur's room was almost a menagerie; for he owned two parrots, a canary, a cage full of mocking-birds, a venerable old cat and her kittens, and a big dog. He seemed to have the gift of fascination

over animals and birds; and notwithstanding the incongruous collection, there was never any wrangling or disturbance in his "happy family."

Fortunately for the peace of the establishment, Mr. Leslie had given up to his valuable but very eccentric professor a small office in the yard, where himself and favorites were removed from the immediate effect of Madame Sevil'e's contempt for his tastes. His personal appearance being quite as remarkable as some of his ways, Monsieur Jean was often a source of amusement to strangers. He persisted in wearing the most unique suit of black velvet, cut after a fashion of his own, and never changed, however fashions might be altered; his queer, wizened face was not much improved by the addition of a velvet smoking-cap, made somewhat in the shape of a funnel, and elaborately embroidered; yet this was his daily attire. Smoking being his chief employment when not on duty in school, he was scarcely ever seen without a pipe of enormous length; which, by the way, was kept in his desk as a solace during recess, and very often used to rap French verbs into obstinate heads. The girls were as much afraid of these unexpected aids to wandering brains as the children of birchen-rod experience were, doubtless, of that famed auxiliary in

the hands of the old school-masters, who did not spare the rod.

Yet, notwithstanding that Monsieur Jean was undoubtedly peculiar, there were none bold or, indeed, unkind enough to laugh. His good-heartedness and sympathy for the whole human family had grown into a proverb in the neighbor hood; for he had dwelt among the people for many years, doing good silently yet effectually, and burying his gifts away from the great world that would not have been sparing of praise for the talents he used so well and yet so humbly.

He was known to possess a neat income, and only pursued his occupation in Mr. Leslie's school from sincere attachment to the family, and a veritable genius he possessed for drilling young brains in the mysteries of language and music.

Meta Wallace was brought under his notice and his love, at first, through her tie of blood with the Leslies, who ranked above the rest of the world in his heart; but his enthusiastic devotion to music, in which her one talent lay, soon made her a favorite for the sake of art. Our little friend's voice was something quite wonderful in compass and sweetness; and no sooner had Monsieur Jean heard her sing, than he at once took her under his protection, invit-

ing her to his menagerie to admire the inmates, telling her wonderful tales of the world's famous singers, and promising great things for her future if she would only carefully avoid the "new school" of music, for which he had great contempt. Meta listened always attentively, though she knew very little about "schools" of that kind, and found it impossible to pronounce the names of some of those famous people. She made herself still more a favorite with her teacher by diligently following his advice and never disputing facts that she knew nothing about; so, before three months of her school-life had passed, she had no stancher friend than the kind old professor, who never failed to show the utmost interest in and regard for her.

A few days after the occurrence on the croquet ground, as the classes in Monsieur's charge sat demurely silent under his strict rule, Meta, who was busily writing out a verb, was roused by a slight whizzing sound, and a roll of paper lodged on her desk.

"Silence!" cried the professor, as a slight clearing of the throat in his vicinity made him look up in time to see violent telegraphing going on behind the unconscious Meta.

"Give it to me, quick!" cried Sallie Owens, in a frightened whisper, to the little girl; "it

isn't meant for you, and Monsieur Jean is looking directly at me. Don't you see you'll get me in trouble?"

All this was hurriedly said in a low tone, while Meta quietly took the roll from off her copy-book, and looked up to find the teacher's eyes fixed on her face.

"What is it?" asked the sonorous voice, gravely.

"Indeed, I don't know, sir," answered Meta, reluctantly.

"Humph! bring it here!"

She prepared to obey, not daring to do otherwise; but with visible unwillingness, for Sallie had caught her dress, saying, beseechingly:

"Hide it, swallow it — anything but show it to him!"

Now, Meta had had enough of swallowing papers, and was not disposed to try that dangerous experiment again; but she stood irresolute as Sallie's pleading voice reached her ears. Here was an opportunity of making a friend of an enemy; and why not seize it? There couldn't be much harm in following her impulse, for Monsieur could only be angry with her; while, if she showed the paper, might it not bring down some dreadful consequence on Sallie's head? Full of the magnanimous purpose of taking the blame

on herself, and showing the girls that she wasn't as bad as they thought her, Meta deliberately tore the paper in several pieces, just as Monsieur Jean came down the little space between the desks, his black cap nodding and shaking from the excitement of its owner being so openly defied.

"What paper was that?" he asked, in awful tones, grasping Meta's hands, and securing the pieces.

"I don't know, sir," she faltered, very much alarmed at the course things were taking. It wasn't so easy to be magnanimous, after all.

"Don't know?" repeated the professor, quite indignant; "then why tear it up?"

No answer.

"You shall not impose on me," he cried, with a frown. "Stay here one, two, three hours after my class goes, and write out twenty-five lines of 'Phèdre.' I teach you to tear up paper in my face! Humph! such child!"

With a glance out of the little sharp eyes that made her tremble, Monsieur Jean, taking the torn paper, went back to his desk; and Meta, with a sinking heart, went back to the conjugation of her verb. The moods and tenses danced and swam before the dark eyes, now brimful of tears. She dared not look up, for an ominous

silence had settled in the room, and she felt those keen eyes were watching her. How was she ever to write "Phèdre?" She didn't understand half the words, and she knew he would want it done without the book. Oh, how dreadful it was he had forgotten that she never had looked inside of that awful Racine, and didn't belong to that class! What would become of her?

Meanwhile, Sallie Owens, though she made no sign, was in quite as miserable a frame of mind. Once she rose in her seat as if to speak, but sat down confusedly when she found Monsieur Jean looking around the room, and did not come to Meta's assistance. Just before dismissing his classes, Monsieur called the culprit up to his desk. She obeyed, with flushed face and hesitating step, very much afraid to hear her sentence. The professor silently pointed to a patched-up sheet of paper, lying on his desk, which proved to be the one she had torn. It was a tolerable representation of the scene between Meta and Julia on the croquet ground, picturing the former in very alarming colors.

"You did not caricature yourself," said Monsieur, grimly; "now tell me who did!"

Meta looked up, blushing crimson at sight of herself, so cleverly yet so maliciously carica-

tured. This was so different from what she had pictured, that she almost gave way under the temptation to expose the artist, who had been amusing herself at her expense; but she did not abandon her purpose of making a friend of Sallie, even for this. Though despising the littleness that could have prompted such a drawing, Meta wisely resolved not to revenge herself as most children would have done, and, though she felt very sorry to have incurred her teacher's displeasure, would not betray her schoolmate, and refused to answer Monsieur's repeated inquiry as to the author's name.

"Then you defy me?" asked Monsieur, glowering on her — "even if I keep you here, one, two, three hours alone, and make you write four, five, six verb?"

"I cannot tell," she said, resolutely.

"Then go back to your seat, and do not move till I tell you — go!" And Monsieur, deeply offended, turned to his book without looking at her again.

In a few minutes after Meta had returned to her seat, the observed of all eyes, Monsieur Jean dismissed the classes. After the noise of departure had subsided, and the door closed after the last girl, Meta bowed her head on the desk to hide her tears. She had looked beseechingly in

Sallie Owens's face as she went out with the rest, but no help came from that quarter. Sallie, though she admired moral courage in others, did not possess the quality, for all her bold self-confidence; and Meta was left to brave Monsieur's anger alone.

A long silence followed the girl's departure, which was finally broken by the sharp click of the key in Monsieur Jean's desk, as he prepared to leave the room. Gathering up an armful of books and papers, he came to Meta's desk, and looked down on the bowed head reflectively.

"You no write your 'Phèdre?'" he asked, suddenly. "Child, what you mean by such ways? I keep you here all day, if you defy me so!"

"I don't mean to defy you," she sobbed, raising her tearful face a moment; "I only can't write 'Phèdre.'"

"Can't write? What for not?"

"Because — indeed, Monsieur — I'm not in that class, and I can't pronounce the words," she faltered, beseechingly.

"So!" said monsieur, in a grave voice. "And you won't tell me who did that piece?"

"I can't, I can't! Oh, please don't ask me!" she cried, laying her hand on his arm entreatingly; "I couldn't tell you. I'd rather try to write the hard words, Monsieur."

Monsieur shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and turned away. With his hand on the door, he gave her one more trial.

"You tell me the smart artist? Come!" he cried, coaxingly; "then you go out and play with the rest!"

Meta, too tearful to make answer, could only shake her head.

"Then," said Monsieur, out of patience — "then you write me two verbs, and a long exercise! You no need to mind 'Phèdre' this time!" And, so saying, he slammed the door after him, and went off.

Meta bore her sentence bravely. To be sure, the room was very lonely, and looked twice as big now that it was empty of all but desks and benches; but after a good cry she cheered up, and took out her exercise-book to write the verbs. A little resolution helped the matter wonderfully; and by the time she had finished one verb, she had conquered the desire to be very miserable, and took a brighter view of the punishment. After all, she did not feel sure that her magnanimous treatment of Sallie Owens was altogether right; but, having made up her mind to refer the matter to Miss Clifton, she did not trouble herself with doubts, and worked herself into a state of great self-satisfaction at having

been so brave before the girls who disliked her and called her "spooney." It wasn't a bit "spooney" to take Sallie's punishment upon herself, she was sure of that, and wondered very much what the girls would think of her conduct.

Meanwhile, the girls were really discussing her as follows:

"I didn't think she had that much in her," cried one of Sallie's followers, as that young heroine recounted the state of the case to an eager group. "Who would have believed the little thing could actually refuse to tell Monsieur Jean?"

"And stay in that dismal room by herself, bothering with old Racine! I'm glad it wasn't me," said another.

"It's well it wasn't," interrupted Sallie, scornfully; "I don't think I'd have come out of the scrape so well, Emma. I tell you what, girls, I've been real mean and cross to that child, and I intend to make up for it; she's worth all the rest of you put together! I'd like to know which of you would have braved Monsieur Jean for a girl that was always snubbing and teasing you! You wouldn't have done it for me, for all you make such a fuss over my perfections."

"Oh, yes, we would, Sallie!" cried several indignant voices.

"Don't believe a word of it," she answered, with great unconcern. "*I* like a girl that has courage enough to stand up for a body; and I tell you what, if anybody meddles with Meta Wallace after this, *I'll* settle with them! She's under my protection in the future. I believe there's a heap in her that only wants the right kind of bringing out, and *I'm* going to develop her qualities. *She's* not 'spooney,' and the very first girl that calls her that, or 'Saint Margaret,' or any other name, will please hold herself responsible to *me!*"

Sallie concluded with a grand air, looking around on her faithful allies in a very determined way; but no one ventured to say anything. Two or three of the girls who were not absolutely bewitched by her fascinations remembered that Sallie's conduct in the class-room had not exhibited the same degree of courage that had called forth her admiration of Meta; but even these made no comment upon the avowed championship of the friendless child, and very naturally resolved to follow their leader in her new freak.

Under the protection of Sallie Owens, and courted by those who had formerly disdained her, Meta's life at school underwent a marked change. She was at once introduced to the for-

midable school-clique that had managed heretofore to make her very unhappy, and she found the difference in her position very pleasant. Though she now saw and heard many things that her conscience could not approve, and very often blushed at the consciousness that Johnny, and even Miss Winny, would not countenance her new friends, Meta was too inexperienced not to give way before the flattering attentions lavished on her, and gave little heed to the "still, small voice" warning her away from the blandishments of this miniature world.

There is often a turning-point in life long before it is suspected by those who look on, much less by the one who is actually passing the boundary; and this turn had come for Meta now. Exposed to the leadership of girls of weak principles and many qualities calculated to blind and mislead an inexperienced child, it would have required greater self-control and wiser resistance than are often found in maturer years, had our young friend remained entirely insensible to such influence. It is a mistake to suppose that school impressions are not frequently lasting, and to place a low estimate upon the powers for good and ill — perhaps for a life-time — that are vested in early association. When those in whom we find talent and fasci-

nation, and who win the first enthusiastic regard of youth, sneer and scoff at what we have been taught to hold sacred, if it does not weaken principle and make us ashamed to avow what is considered a pitiable weakness, it at least rubs off the first horror with which we hear our convictions lightly spoken of and combated. It makes us gloss over and smile at what would once have appalled and dismayed.

And so with Meta. She was at first greatly shocked at the irreligion and irreverence of the clever girls who sought her out and flattered her, but by degrees she ceased to remonstrate, and sometimes smiled when Sallie indulged her wit at the expense of virtue and holiness. Conscience had a hard fight, and was often routed; for Meta had found, even in this quiet retreat, full opportunity of battling against the world.

CHAPTER XXII.

"WELL, Alicia!" cried Mr. Wallace, one morning, handing an open letter across the table to his wife; "I think, of all Quixotic creatures, Joe Ascher takes the lead. Read that letter, and tell me what you think of his scheme."

"Has he found another little miracle of goodness to adopt?" asked Florence, demurely.

"No," replied her father, helping himself to the dish before him; "no, not exactly, daughter. He is only going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and writes in the most enthusiastic school-boy style of what he hopes to do and see. Fancy his trying to inspire me with some of his ardor, and begging that I should pick up my family, and go too! That would be sensible at my time of life — eh, Florry?"

"I don't know about Palestine," returned Florence, laughing; "I can't exactly picture mamma looking at fusty old ruins and tombs. But, papa, why don't you take us to Europe this year? I think it would be such a good idea to spend the summer at the German spas; everybody goes these days, you know."

"So they do," cried Mrs. Wallace, looking up eagerly as she finished the letter; "it is strange that with our means we should go poking off to these wretched American watering-places every year. It was only the other day that Mrs. Livingston looked *so* surprised that I had actually never crossed the ocean. She wouldn't believe me for a long time."

"Women are never satisfied," said Mr. Wallace. "Suppose you do go, how long would it be before I should have to follow Ascher to Palestine, just because everybody goes these days?"

"Really, Mr. Wallace," replied his wife, languidly, "if there is to be a discussion about it, pray have your own way. Florry, did you look at that *mauve* silk at Arnold's yesterday?"

Here followed a discussion of the silk in question; and Mr. Wallace, used to these summary modes of proceeding, turned to the letter, and glanced over the contents again.

"Where is the enclosure for Meta?" he asked, suddenly addressing his wife.

"The enclosure for Meta?" she repeated. "Really, I had forgotten all about it. Here it is in the envelope, I think. Let's see what he says to his paragon!"

After a short silence, she exclaimed, pettishly:

"Well! It's quite out of the question to send this letter to Meta; she is absurdly quiet and grave, anyhow, and I shall put a stop to *that* intimacy. Thank fortune, the man *is* going to the ends of the earth; just listen to his nonsense, Edward." And she read out the following extract:

Do you know, little one, that your earnest face and your stirring words have sent me off on a pilgrimage? I am so anxious to keep my promise faithfully, that I have determined to carry my skepticism into the very scene of faith; to tread step by step the sorrowful path which has brought about such wonderful results for the good of mankind; and see if, by the blessing of God and my little friend's prayers, a face-to-face encounter with the grounds of the Christian's belief may not work in me some mighty change. I will not deny that there is much beside my desire to "love God" that has determined me to visit the Holy Land; but what may not such believing prayers as yours, my little friend, effect in working out my salvation? Of course you *are* praying for me, are you not? . . .

"Now, isn't that an idea?" cried Mrs. Wallace, looking up. "As if Meta wasn't hard enough to manage, without filling her head with such things! I'm very thankful that

she didn't go with him, really. The next thing, he'll be advising her to go into a convent, or one of the sisterhoods; and she's so excitable and foolish, I believe she will do something of that kind yet. No, indeed, Mr. Joseph Ascher," she continued, quoting angrily from the letter in hand; "no, indeed! You won't get any such 'encouraging letters from your sweet young friend,' nor write her those interesting accounts of 'your battle against doubt.' This is the end of your influence with Meta, or I am very much mistaken!"

Here Mrs. Wallace bade Thomas throw Meta's letter in the fire; and when she saw it in a blaze, she gave a sigh of relief, and rose from the table.

"Do you intend to stop the correspondence?" asked Mr. Wallace, gravely. "Remember, Alicia, that we can hardly hold Ascher to his proposals, if we forbid him to write to the child —"

"I do not desire a penny of his fortune for Meta," interrupted the mother, excitedly; "when I refused his pretentious offer, I meant just what I said, and do not intend to change my mind. Of course, I shall stop the correspondence! Meta need never know that he wrote, and I shall assuredly give him a piece of my mind, and request him not to write to her again. When will you answer his letter?"

"I believe I will not answer at all, but turn the matter over to you, and you may do as you please. I think you are half right. Ascher is a good-enough fellow, but very eccentric; perhaps it *is* better for Meta to be kept from his influence yet awhile. Meanwhile, Florry," turning to his daughter — "meanwhile, you and I will talk about our trip to Europe, won't we?"

"That we will!" cried Florry, clapping her hands. "You are a dear, good, jolly papa to think of it. When shall we go?"

"Whenever mamma pleases," he said, smiling.

"Are you in earnest, Mr. Wallace?"

"Perfectly, my dear. Florry's idea is a capital one. The only difficulty is, poor little Meta — "

"She can easily stay with Sidney," interposed her mother, hastily. "I am glad to see that she has made so much progress in music and languages, and seems to be something of a favorite with Sidney's wife. I haven't the least fear of leaving her in such hands."

"But we might take her abroad to school," suggested Mr. Wallace, his heart reproaching him for not insisting upon her claims being considered.

"No," said his wife, very decidedly, "there's no sense in any such thing. Meta is only twelve

now, recollect, and she must not be interrupted at her studies. If she went abroad, there would be no possibility of having her suitably educated, for I know your courage would give out if she had to be left at one of those foreign schools."

"That's true," sighed the father, ruefully; "I expect you know best, Alicia. But poor little Meta has not been at home since she left us, remember."

"Of course, I remember; but how could I help it? The first vacation, wasn't I *obliged* to take Florry out of the city early? and last summer, wasn't my trip out West of sufficient importance to —"

"Oh, yes, I suppose it's all right," sighed Mr. Wallace, lighting a cigar, and preparing to leave the dining-room. "You and Florry can arrange it between you, somehow, and before we go we will run up for a little visit to Meta, won't we?"

"If I can find time. There, Mr. Wallace, pray don't talk as if I were neglecting that child! I wish, when you are always insinuating such disagreeable things, you would sometimes think of Florry's cough, that keeps me dosing and nursing *her*."

"Florry's cough!" echoed her father, looking in the beautiful, fair face of his darling; "why, sweet child, I never noticed your cough! How long has she had one, Alicia?"

"Just like a man!" cried Mrs. Wallace, pettishly. "Your thoughts run in one groove, and I believe if we all died off under your eyes you'd never know it! Of course, Florry has a slight cough; just enough for me to spend all my pocket money in 'Cherry Pectoral,' and such things," in a grieved tone.

"I am sure, mamma," said Florry, as the slight cough came on in confirmation of her mother's words — "I am sure I hate and detest those syrups. Don't make papa believe I want any more money to invest in *them*. You know I threw that last bottle of 'Pectoral' in the fire-place."

"Well, well," said Mr. Wallace, soothingly; "never mind, Florry! I'll have some kind of cough mixture made into candy for you. Alicia," he went on, gravely, after sending Florence up-stairs for a book he had suddenly remembered to want, "Alicia, that girl is dreadfully pale and fragile. Why have you never before told me about a cough?"

"Now, don't get so excited, Mr. Wallace! There's no use in making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Florry has taken a wretched cold, and she is pale, because she mopes in this uninteresting place so long."

"Humph! I hope it's no worse, dear. Your aunt died of some lung affection, you know."

"Mercy on us, Mr. Wallace! You are enough to scare a body's life out of her! Don't suggest such a thing, please. Hush! here comes Florry now."

"Good-bye, my pet," said the father, caressingly, as he kissed her forehead, and handed her a crisp, new bank-note. "Go down town with mamma this morning, and buy something pretty for your European tour. We must get off as soon as you women can fix yourselves up."

"Flaxseed candy," wrote Mr. Wallace in his note-book as he rode down town. "I'll have to keep an eye on Florry. I don't like that extreme languor, and she is as thin as a lath. We must try sea air at once. Poor little girl! her Aunt Edith went off just like this; pale in the morning, rosy as a peach by dinner-time, and *so* indifferent to everything! Lord help us!"

It was not often that Mr. Wallace's ejaculations were of a prayerful kind, but this one came from his heart. He had been so long used to his daughter's delicate appearance that he seldom thought of it; but the bare mention of a cough made him shudder. The idea of trying change of scene and the excitement of travel for his darling was fixed in his mind, and from that day extensive preparations went on for the projected tour.

Mr. Wallace, like all unobservant, careless people, when once aroused to a possible danger, exaggerated the extent of it, and made himself miserable over trifles. Florry was dosed with quack medicines, and made to undergo a species of torture; never allowed to set foot on the ground, and growing heartily sick of being so tenderly watched. Her father was in a fever of impatience to try the sea-voyage, and urged upon his wife the importance of haste whenever they were alone. But Mrs. Wallace did not think seriously of the cough at all, and would not be warned. She was engrossed in preparations for departure, and quite carried away at the prospect of a long residence abroad; for the father had agreed that, if Florry improved very much, they might make a two years' tour, and there was so much *éclat* in this grand way of "doing Europe" that Mrs. Wallace could think of nothing else.

Meta's first knowledge of the proposed voyage came to her quite suddenly, and she was overwhelmed with grief. She had cheerfully borne the disappointment of not spending her vacations at home, because she knew that she would have been left at Bellevue with Walker, and never expected her mother to do more than send her large boxes of nice things and plenty

of pocket money. There were always summer boarders among the girls at the Leslies', and she found their society much more enlivening than her solitary life at Bellevue would have been. But it was one thing to be content, knowing that in any emergency she might go home or summon her parents, and quite another and more painful thing to be separated by miles of ocean and land from all who were near to her heart.

Meta had learned a good deal from her experience and observation among other girls, and she could but feel the contrast between the relations of some of her friends to *their* mothers and her own case. It was very mortifying that they were all so willing to be rid of her; this she had felt when the first refusal of permission to spend the holidays at home had come as a sudden damper to her joyful anticipations. But she had never believed it possible that they *could* leave her and go across the ocean for such a length of time, and sobbed out her mortification and sorrow so piteously on her father's shoulder, when he made the announcement, in the brief visit before the family left, that he was more than half inclined to bid her pack up and return with him to New York. Mrs. Wallace had found it impossible to pay Meta a visit, as she was con-

fined to her room for a week before the vessel sailed; so Florry and Mr. Wallace made the family adieux, supplying the lonely girl with various kinds of confectionery and sweetmeats, but denying her what she so craved: to be taken to the family love as Florry was.

"You will see Mr. Ascher," she said, when composure had been gained by a great effort; "do say ever so much for me, Florry. I wonder why he never wrote to me but once, and did not answer my last letter."

Florence shook her curls, looking very conscious, and Mr. Wallace hummed a tune.

"Men forget," announced the sister, sententiously; "and then, Mr. Ascher is going to the Holy Land."

"*I* shouldn't forget, though," cried Meta, "if I went ever so often to the Holy Land." And then, a sense of the parting coming over her, she said no more. Disappointments were not new to her; and though she felt grieved that Mr. Ascher could so soon have forgotten, she was hardly surprised that even this friendship had some shade in it.

Mr. Wallace, though he did not follow his inclinations, and allow Meta to be of the party, did, upon reflection and a consultation with Florry, who sympathized with Meta's depriva-

tion, allow her to go home for a few days to say good-bye to mamma. Mrs. Wallace, who had never thought of such a simple plan, was quite pleased at sight of the child, and caressed her so affectionately, praising her improved looks and manners with so much satisfaction, that the parting was made still more difficult.

At last the day of departure arrived, and the steamship went on her way. Meta, standing on the wharf, disconsolate and tearful, amid all the bustle and noise, leaned heavily on Cousin Sidney's arm, and waved her handkerchief until tears blinded her sight and Mr. Leslie considerately led her back to the carriage.

The return to school, and the days of loneliness that followed, made her very sad; but by the time her first long, kind letter from her mother was received, she had fallen into the old routine, and regained her cheerfulness. This separation would have been more severely felt had she not been thrown so much on her own resources as to be schooled into greater self-reliance, and somewhat outside the real influences of home. Everybody was kind and affectionate, pitying her for the trial, and lavishing many tendernesses she had never found at home. Miss Clifton and Mrs. Leslie, and even Madame Seville, made the first days pass off

more quickly by constant attention, and Monsieur Jean was kindness itself; so, on the whole, though it seemed a very bitter thing to bear at first, she really had lost only in name the watchfulness of a mother's love.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOR some weeks after Meta's return to school, the influence of Sallie Owens and her clique, which had been silently working so long, was considerably weakened. The society of reckless girls was not so agreeable now that she was sad and sorrowful, and many things grated upon her sense of duty which she had not noticed before. The truth is, Meta had yielded unconsciously to the evil, and scarcely knew how far she had strayed from her self-appointed path until, in looking over her summer dresses one half-holiday, she found Johnny's Bible under a pile of muslins, and the page of sentences, once so precious, folded away among her stray papers in an old portfolio. This was the price she had paid for Sallie Owens's championship. The result had not

come about suddenly; indeed, she was scarcely aware of the gradual change in her feelings. The listlessness with which her Bible was now read was ascribed to the fatigues of study; and when she found it hard not to be sleepy over her prayers, it never occurred to her that the vanity of lip service had grown into a habit. She had forgotten the exhortation, "Be watchful," and in an unwary hour her heart was besieged by the world. But, after the departure of her family, she suddenly awoke to all this. The earnest talks with Winny Clifton, who had been long neglected for her companions, opened her eyes to the folly of following in such guidance as Sallie's; but she had not the courage to break off. The girls, who had found her so ready to enter into their various frolics, felt the change, but it was not tangible enough for complaint, and none was made. Yet, whenever she wavered and hesitated, there was always some timely and plausible way devised of keeping her from withdrawing, and her good resolutions bore no fruit.

In this way it happened that Meta became involved in a frolic which led to disastrous results, simply because she had lost the capacity of saying "no;" a very short word, but often very difficult to say — as Meta found it.

The expedition was a wildly conceived piece

of mischief, and promised very little enjoyment; but Sallie, who headed the set, administered her dexterous flattery, and persuaded Meta into the spirit of the frolic, frequently alluding to the "fun" of getting out of school-bounds, and eating as many strawberries as pleased them, without anybody being the wiser. Had the girls been a little older, it would have seemed very dismal "fun" to take a walk of a mile over muddy roads, during a spell of rainy weather; but girls seldom pause to reflect when mischief is ahead, and these were not wiser than their generation.

Mr. Leslie's school was at the southern extremity of a little village, and the farm, at which Sallie proposed getting her strawberries, exactly at the other end of the long street. It would have been very easy to walk boldly down the plank walk of the said street, in full view of villagers and school windows, with little risk to the feet of the party, had they so dared; but even the bold Sallie proposed no such proceeding. They were to climb a low fence in the rear of the garden, and take a circuitous walk of two miles, through a thick wood, in mud and mire, under dripping trees, and at risk of health — to say nothing of Mr. Leslie's anger — and all because her ready brain had discovered "fun" in the expedition.

After Meta had agreed to be of the party, she would very willingly have withdrawn; for it was a dark, rainy day, and promised but little pleasure. Sallie Owens was in despair. One or two of the girls, who had bad colds, declined to go at all; but rain only increased the ardor of some of the most reckless, and Sallie mustered a considerable party, notwithstanding the leaden clouds and northeasterly wind and rain. The time chosen for this unlucky frolic was the afternoon study hour, when the girls were only occasionally visited in their several rooms by one of the teachers, and might hope to get off without being detected in the start.

After dinner, when Meta was hurrying along one of the passages to join the party, who had agreed to meet in the bowling alley, fearing that she was too late, she suddenly encountered Monsieur Jean. The tassel on his black cap nodded in time to his cheerful greeting as he paused and looked down in her face.

"So!" he said, smiling. "You will come with me, *petite*, and try what we can do with that new song?"

"It is study hour," she said, blushing at the equivocation.

"Ah, but so is my music lessson a study! Come! You need not fear madame's anger. I

make it all straight, I promise you! No? What for you so careful with study hour to-day? Don't you know how many times we spend it together?"

"Yes," said Meta, still blushing, and shrinking back from his outstretched hand; "yes, I know that, but I cannot go with you now."

"What for not?" persisted Monsieur, looking at her blushing face keenly. "Humph! Suppose I say you *must* go, what then?"

"I would beg you to let me off," she replied, bravely; "I have promised —"

"To study — eh?"

"No, Monsieur, to go off somewhere! Don't ask me any more, please!"

Monsieur Jean looked into her face a moment, and made up his mind. "She is in some trouble, poor child!" he thought, compassionately; "I will take her away till she forgets it." Aloud he said:

"Come, *petite*, you not to study, to-day. We will go to the music-room. Don't shake your head! Come!"

Seizing her hand, he turned her around in the passage, and, laughing at her discomfiture, led her straight to madame's room.

"Here, I bring you one industrious child," he cried, as madame opened the door, "who will

not give up her study, though I command her to practice. What you think of such a scholar?"

Madame looked at the pair searchingly, and then laughed too. Meta said not a word, though she felt very guilty, until madame commended her industry, and then she found courage to speak.

"I don't deserve it," she said, desperately. "Monsieur is altogether mistaken. I had promised to go somewhere, and did not intend to study at all."

"To go somewhere?" repeated madame, instantly looking grave; "where, and with whom, my dear?"

Meta shook her head despondingly.

"I know you will be very angry," she said, humbly; "but, indeed, I cannot tell you."

Monsieur Jean shrugged his shoulders.

"Her way!" he said, with a gesture of compassion. "You no get it out of her, madame. She keep secret better than any one I know. Come! Let me take off my prisoner, and we go sing our song."

But madame would not consent to this. Meta was invited into the bright, pretty room, and all Monsieur's entreaties refused. The disappointed Frenchman gave madame a piece of advice very rapidly in his own language, but she only smiled and shut the door.

When they were alone, madame exhausted her eloquence on Meta in vain. She would not tell where she had intended to spend her afternoon, and the teacher, after a moment's reflection, concluded to keep her in durance vile until she did confess.

Meta stood at the window, looking out at the rain, almost glad to have escaped her walk, and wondering what the girls would think of her for deserting them. To be sure, she had not intended to do so, but would Sallie believe this? Her mind was very much divided between relief at missing the dangerous expedition and fear of losing ground with the girls; though she had quite decided that it would be very mean if she betrayed them, and resolved not to save herself from a scolding at their expense. The time came when she would have given much had she only made a timely confession; but, not having the gift of foresight, she judged the case by her code of honor, and refused to betray the expedition.

Meanwhile, after exhausting their patience and abusing Meta's delay, the girls went off without her, climbing over the fence without accident, and running and walking through the wet woods. By the time Mr. Smith's farm was reached, a great many wished themselves back

at school; for there was very little amusement in being wet and chilled through. The servant who answered the bell stared wonderingly at the group of dripping figures.

"Be's you the girls from Leslie's?" she cried.

"Yes," returned Sallie, who was spokesman. "We have come to eat strawberries; go and tell Mr. Smith at once."

"Well, I never!" muttered the girl, as she went away and knocked at a door in the rear of the house.

After some delay, a young man came to the door.

"Father's out," he said, his eyes twinkling; "but I guess you can have the strawberries. Come along!"

"Oh, thank you!" cried several voices; and the troop of girls followed him through the house, leaving foot-prints on the shining floor, out to the terraced garden, where Mr. Smith's luscious fruit grew in great quantities. The rain poured steadily down, the berries were sandy, and the ground too wet for comfort; altogether the "fun" was dismal. Mr. Smith's son, enjoying this unexpected visit, and being a lover of fun, dexterously managed to prolong the amusement; for whenever a tired girl attempted to start the party, he would propose to show

larger and sweeter fruit in another part of the garden, so a considerable time was consumed. At last a start was made, and Sallie offered to pay for what they had eaten; but this the boy refused, assuring them that he was fully compensated by the afternoon's enjoyment; and, having no time to waste words, they were obliged to accept as a gift what they had expected to buy.

The walk homeward was tiresome and cold. Sallie, declaring she felt half-sick, was very cross and fault-finding. Every one agreed mentally that the whole thing was a miserable failure, though in Sallie's present mood it was scarcely advisable to say so. It was a relief to the whole party when the trees of Glencove School were visible through the rain. Over the fence they scrambled, one after another; and as each bedraggled figure reached the other side, an exclamation of surprise and dismay was wafted back to the others. There, a few paces from the fence, stood Mr. Leslie, under a big umbrella, looking very stern and uncompromising.

"Well, young lady!" he cried, addressing a girl who could get no further than the top of the fence, through sheer fright; "make a little exertion, do; for I am quite chilled by this rain, whatever you may be."

"O papa!" groaned Julia, whom it proved to

be, as she caught her foot in the fence, and rolled over at his feet.

Mr. Leslie gravely raised her, without making any comment, and drew her under the umbrella. The girls were escorted in perfect silence to the house, one on each side of Mr. Leslie, who said nothing during the wet tramp through the garden. As each mortified girl hung her head before his rebuking glance, one thought alone was predominant. Had they been severally questioned, the result would have been surely to this effect: "That hateful Meta Wallace! It's all *her* work, I'll be bound!"

As they were wet to the skin, and shivering, the case was too serious for immediate discipline, and they were left to their own reflections, forbidden to leave their respective apartments.

At a subsequent meeting of those in authority, there was much discussion of the most feasible punishment; but the side of justice, tempered with mercy, conquered. Banishment for a month from all the privileges and society of their companions was the sentence.

When Madame Seville entered her room, after the meeting of teachers, she went up to Meta, and forced her to look in her face. Then, after recounting the discovery of her friends' frolic, and the punishment devised, she said, severely:

"*This* is what you were about to do, Meta! Don't deny it."

"I do not intend to deny it," she cried, proudly. "Yes, this *is* what I was going to do!"

"Then you shall share the sentence," said madame, frowning. "It was not through any sense of duty that you were not with the rest, and it is only just."

"I don't complain," interrupted Meta, petulantly. "Yes, it is just. I don't want to escape punishment."

"Don't be so indifferent and rude, Meta," cried madame, impatiently. "You ought to have known better than to be drawn into such a thing. Why didn't you confess hours ago?"

"Because I don't care to be a traitor, madame."

"A traitor!" repeated the lady, scornfully. "I have no doubt you think it was very honorable and brave to let these misguided girls risk health and the confidence of their teachers, when one word from you would have put a stop to it all. You would have shown better sense and more courage to have braved their anger, for the sake of saving them from worse than scolding."

Meta turned away her face to hide the tears. She had not intended to do anything wrong,

and she could not make up her mind to betray the girls' expedition; but, though she resented madame's speech, and thought hard that the responsibility should be laid upon her, she nevertheless regretted that she had not told, in violation of her ideas of honor, as the possible consequences of the frolic loomed up before her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONLY a few days of the allotted punishment had passed, when the school was suddenly overshadowed by a grievous calamity: the presence of sickness and probability of death. The news, following so soon after the excitement of the frolic, that one of the heads of the reckless party was stricken with sudden illness, created a panic among the girls. Sallie Owens, who had been feverish and ailing for some days before her tramp in the rain, was suffering from the exposure in an acute attack of pneumonia. The physician shook his head gravely, as soon as he took a survey of the case, and promised the anxious Mrs. Leslie a very sick patient.

"It is a very serious affair," he said, ear-

nestly; "there is so much inflammation that I foresee tough times — possibly great danger."

When the news spread through the house, after a few days of her illness, that the anticipated danger had really come, and Sallie was likely to die, all discipline was at an end. Girls went about the passages whispering, with frightened faces, teachers were alarmed, and the sharers of Sallie's favor grievously sad. Meta's distress knew no bounds. Madame's words recurred to her again and again, and she tortured herself with a thousand longings that she had prevented the expedition, even in the way she so much despised. Full of her nervous self-rebukings, she found no comfort in the fact that this was not her own doing; that, as the doctor declared, the exposure had only developed the unfavorable symptoms, and not originated the disease; that in all probability the attack would have been just as serious, since congestion could but ensue from the condition of the lungs. Full of self-reproach, she had sought Miss Clifton and poured out her grief and distress.

"O Miss Winny!" she cried, sorrowfully; "I cannot help feeling that I might have saved her —"

"But that would have been quite impossible," interrupted her friend. "Remember, Sallie's life

is in other hands; and though you may be sincerely grieved to have encouraged her recklessness, don't allow yourself to believe that any act of yours could have stayed God's design. We should only take the lesson to heart, poor child! and remember to keep our lamps trimmed; for 'in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.'"

Miss Clifton took her station at Sallie's side as soon as the worst was known, and, though she could not render her much bodily service, the sick girl clung, in her sore need, to the very one whose beautiful life had provoked so many unkind speeches in her days of gayety and mirth; and it was to Winny that the task of preparing the young soul for its journey was confided. Few had greater tenderness of heart, none more perfect faith and trust in the promises that would lighten the shadows of death; and Winny's whole soul was engaged in the sad office of ministering comfort to the fearful, doubting girl, who was appalled at the suddenness of her summons. At first her grief and fear were overwhelming; but by degrees the distressing dread subsided, and her eyes were opened to the peace offered, as well as to the recklessness and uselessness of her life. She could not have fallen into better hands than Winny Clifton's, who had,

herself, battled with doubts and fears, and knew so well how to meet the sorrowful questions that came up after the first surprise and dread were over; and after many hours of earnest, prayerful effort, she enjoyed the supreme happiness of comforting the parting soul with some of her own faith, lessening Sallie's fears, and imparting trust in the promises that never yet have failed the contrite heart.

After Sallie had been told of her condition, and Winny's soothing words had brought that calm of spirit that was so great a contrast to the first outburst of dread, Meta's first visit was allowed. Bending over her friend, with the rising sobs choking the words she longed to say, she could not look in that pale face, so changed since she last saw it, without a pang of self-reproach for the little she had ever done to help her wavering, undisciplined heart. Sallie was greatly moved, but she did not say much; only, when Meta's sobs became so loud and distressing, she whispered:

"Never mind me, Meta; don't cry! Miss Winny says I need not be afraid! Only, dear friend, never forget my fate! Please forgive me—"

"O Sallie! Don't talk about *my* forgiving you," sobbed Meta, overcome; "*I* have nothing to forgive!"

The tears stole down Sallie's cheek at these words, and she turned her face to the wall for a few moments; then, raising Meta's hand, she said, slowly:

"What were those lines you read me once about 'Death and the dark vale?' Can't you say them for me? I remember I liked them then."

"How can I say them, dear Sallie, when I—"

"Never mind," said Sallie, soothingly; "you needn't do it, if you would rather not."

But Meta saw the disappointed expression in her face, and, mastering her emotion, repeated in a trembling voice the beautiful lines:

When Death is coming near,
When thy heart shrinks with fear,
And thy limbs fail,
Then raise thy hands, and pray
To Him who lights the way
Through the dark vale.

See'st thou the eastern dawn?
Hear'st thou in the red morn
The angels' song?
Oh, lift thy drooping head,
Thou who in gloom and dread
Hast lain so long.

Death comes to set thee free!
Oh, meet him cheerily
As thy true friend;
And all thy fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end.

"'Eternal peace,'" repeated Sallie, feebly; "oh, if I could only be sure!"

Meta, without daring to trust her voice, hurriedly left the room, and, running to Miss Winny's chamber, threw herself in an agony of tears on the bed.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON the eighth day after Sallie's seizure, the girls who had known her best were summoned for a last farewell. The dying girl was greatly moved, and even in her excessive weakness strove to say something comforting to each, as the tearful faces bent over her.

"It's only a little while, old friends," she said, slowly and with effort, "and then we will meet again. I have been very rebellious, but God is merciful to forgive me, and I trust in him. He has given me time, and opened my eyes to all my willful sin. You know he came to save sinners, girls? Miss Winny says so — God bless her!"

Even this exertion exhausted Sallie's strength, and when Winny bent over to administer stimu-

lant, she saw a pained, weary look in her eyes. Motioning the girls to withdraw, she took the restless hands in hers, and whispered words of faith and comfort, till the short, hard breathing had ceased in a quiet sleep. Sitting there in the still chamber, almost in the immediate presence of Death, she could but think of the mercy that had been shown the trembling soul. What if she had been cut off with no time to name the name of Jesus, or if her mind had been too clouded with mists to grasp the peace and salvation offered her? Instead of this, the Lord, mighty to save, had stretched forth his hand, and gathered the stray sheep into the fold.

Sallie died very peacefully during that night, with her hand clasped in Miss Clifton's. The new-found peace did not desert her at the last, and she passed away with hope and faith in the Lord Jesus.

When the tearful, awe-struck companions, who had so long followed their clever leader, entered the silent chamber where Sallie lay shrouded in the midst of pure white flowers, there was not a heart but felt sorrowful and reproached. Few there were whose conscience did not recall hasty words, and unkind actions, and bitter feelings cherished against one who could never resent or pardon more. A strange worker is Death:

He shows *our* faults as fires at night;
He sweeps *their* failings out of sight;
He clothes their good in heavenly light.
O Christ, our Life! predate the work of Death,
And do this now!
Thou who art Love! thus hallow our beloved!
Not Death, but thou!

Sitting beside Miss Clifton at Sallie's coffin, Meta's greatest life-lesson was learned. The reckless, indifferent state in which she had been gradually losing her earnest desires after holiness was swept away in an instant as the past came up in review before her sorrowful heart, and she saw how ignobly she had fallen in her first battle with temptation. She had been healed through another's stripes, but yet she *was* healed, and this season of self-abasement and condemnation did the work of years. It seemed impossible to realize that this pale, cold figure was all that was left of the eager, bright, untiring spirit that had held such sway in the minds of her companions. The busy hands were folded over the quiet heart in eternal calm; the bright eyes were closed, and the long, dark lashes lay peacefully on her pale cheek. A slight breeze stirring the shining waves of hair gave such a mockery of life that Meta leaned her head on the coffin, and cried bitterly.

"Oh, if I could only hear her speak once

more!" she sighed. "It is all so strange — so hard to bear!"

"Shall I tell you *my* thoughts, Meta?" asked Miss Clifton.

O change! — O wondrous change!
Burst are the prison bars;
This moment *there*, so low,
So agonized, and now
Beyond the stars!

O change! — stupendous change!
There lies the soulless clod;
The sun eternal breaks —
The new immortal wakes —
Wakes with his God!

When the solemn funeral service was read, and Sallie's body consigned to the dust, a dull quiet settled on all hearts. It had been so sudden and overwhelming that it was more like a troubled dream than reality. Sallie having only distant relatives, and they living far off in the West, she was buried in the pretty church-yard of the village, almost in sight of the girls she had so long ruled. Yet the school relapsed into the old routine, so sadly interrupted, and life's busy whirl went on the same. It is a strange, sad fact that death's solemn warning wears off so fast; that life's active round so soon begins. Those in whom our hearts are centered pass

away forever, and yet we learn to bear what seems unbearable, and live to find in other ties the needs we crave. Like a pebble thrown into a stream, the ruffling of the waters is but transient, and it is only in secret and in silence that we hold the anniversaries of the heart's dead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IT was a brilliant day in early summer, and the woods around Glencove were redolent with a thousand sweets. The girls had collected under the leafy branches, near a pretty sparkling stream, for an impromptu picnic, their merry voices making the echoes ring with mirth, and happy faces completing a very pretty picture in the old woods.

Somewhat apart from the rest, Winny Clifton's chair was wheeled under a large oak, where she could witness the happy sports of her gay companions without throwing restraint over their girlish freedom of speech and the hilarity of their various plays. She was always a welcome member of every pleasure party, and it had come to be a part of her duties in the school to accompany the out-door ramblers; her

influence being such a happy one that she was easily induced to forego her more quiet enjoyments at home for the sake of giving the girls an occasional holiday.

But though the sunshine on this sweet summer day made a glory of the scene, and the light laughter of the merry creatures told of no shadow, there was one amongst them whose heart was sad, and her face clouded over, though she forced herself to join in the general gayety. Meta Wallace, grown into a tall, graceful girl, with a face of rare sweetness, and most attractive, winning ways, was taking her farewell ramble in Glencove woods; and she sat silently by Winny's side, very sad and sorrowful that her school-days were over, and the morrow would find her on the way to the great world and her old home.

To most young girls an *entrée* into brilliant society and the cessation of school duties brings unmixed delight; but Meta was no ordinary, thoughtless school-girl, who looked no further than the present for her happiness. She had found such peaceful enjoyment in the quiet pursuit of duty, and her life had grown so much more one of purpose, with the experience gained in her miniature world, that she had no desire to increase the difficulties of the Chris-

tian's path by mixing in the countless temptations that would await her in her new sphere. The earnestness and seriousness of her childhood had only developed with years, and her greatest desire and longing was to live above the trivialities and follies to which she had yielded in the first unguarded days of her school-life. The death of her old ideal of girlishness, Sallie Owens, had made a lasting impression upon her thoughtful nature; and, the lesson of life's vanity once learned, she never forgot the agony with which such knowledge was gained. A favorite alike with teachers and pupils for unwavering rectitude and engaging manners, she had grown to be such a natural part of the school that her recall to New York on the return of her family to America caused the greatest sorrow among them all. To Meta it was not like going home; she felt almost a stranger among her own kindred. *They* had never done anything to make home pleasant to her, and here she had found such stanch friends that, though she desired greatly to look again in her parents' faces, she sighed that it was to be a lasting leave of the newer but precious friends who had taken her, in her great loneliness, to their hearts, and, developing all that was pure and noble in her character, had helped her to subdue and overcome her faults.

And so it was that she sat at Winny's feet, apart from the others, with her head resting on her friend's knee, and a far-away, wistful look in her great dark eyes, as if she would fain read what the future had in store for her.

"I scarcely know whether to be glad or sorry," said Miss Clifton, playing with the bright curls in her lap.

"O Winny!" said Meta, reproachfully; "how can *you* find anything pleasant in my going away?"

"Not pleasant, little friend, but yet not so very serious as you think. It is very easy to sit apart from the battle-field and plan a victory, but surely it is more noble and glorious not to shun the fray, but to engage in the strife and the bloodshed before seeking to wear the laurels."

"Ah! but if I am defeated and trodden under foot?"

"Will that lessen the victory, think you, dear Meta? I am afraid you count too much upon your own strength, and expect to gain your conquests unaided."

"Nay, Winny, it is far otherwise with me! It is just because I fear my own weakness, and know so well how easily I am overcome, that I would rather live away from temptation."

"A profound Christian sentiment," said Miss Clifton, playfully, "but one I did not expect to hear from *you*."

"Then you think it is wiser to expose yourself to dangers which you know will prove too much for your strength?"

"Nothing of the kind. I mean, simply, that God has given us our appointed spheres of duty, and it is cowardly to shun them. I do not doubt that you will find it harder to be religious in the midst of fashionable life, surrounded with every luxury that wealth can buy; but it is your path, and you must tread it. I question very much whether your old pensioner, Kitty Laurence, would not prefer to change places with you. I do not doubt that she fancies her querulousness and ill-temper would be improved, and her path to heaven made much easier, if she had no thought of the morrow, and its bread to get, and the little mouths to feed. So it is just impossible for us to know what we need, Meta. One thing should sustain you: that 'He who has begun in you a good work is able to finish it,' and that he never suffers us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be.'"

"But, Winny, you don't know how hard it is to be good when every man's hand seems to be

against you and your best intentions are misunderstood! *Here* I have had no such drawbacks, and I am afraid of the shoals and quicksands that I know I must encounter."

"And do you think the recluse saints of old had greater merit for living away from temptation?" asked her friend, earnestly. "I have always believed it one of the greatest mistakes of early Christianity, that one of its precepts enjoined separation from the world, where God designs us to be tested; and the chief merit was to shut one's self away from humanity, and its countless demands upon our time and patience and sympathy, in the vain idea that a negative sort of goodness which encountered no obstacle to progress was of more avail than the daily, hourly warfare of right against wrong. So, Meta dear, don't seek your models in those far ages. Come to the present, where the Christian is taught that God's will is as surely worked out in the crowded thoroughfare, jostling against the worldly and covetous, exposed to dazzling visions of the pleasures of sin and the pride of life, with countless voices urging to the broad path, and many drawbacks to virtue, as though the Christian were shut away by high convent walls from the sounds of the busy world, and had no greater crime in prospect than yawning over his litanies or his beads."

"*Brava!*" cried Monsieur Jean, nodding his head, and smiling, as he came from behind Miss Clifton's chair, where he had heard the whole of her eager speech. "So, that is what you tell my friend Meta? What a little Protestant it is!"

"Forgive me," said Winny, earnestly, "if I have said anything to offend the convictions of our good Monsieur Jean! I had no idea you were within hearing."

"Well? Have I said I admire not your advice? Bah!" shrugging his shoulders; "I like better your thoroughfare, Miss Clifton, than the convent walls! But we shall not talk of this, when our sunbeam is going to-morrow! You and I can take our big quarrels another time, if you will. Ah, *ma petite!* Who sings for me now the dear '*Di provenza*' and the other songs? I will have to run down to your great city one of these days when you are famous, to have my old ears rejoiced with that voice I have bring up and pet like my birds. Eh, *petite?*"

"Oh, no, Monsieur! *I* shall never be famous. But when Florry marries, and mamma is full of her busy cares, I will run away from the world for awhile, and sing for you here. They would not miss me, you know."

"Heyday! You run off from father and mother

like that? I think better things of you, *petite!* So!" he went on soothingly, as she blushed and attempted to speak. "So! Don't say a word; I know what you think of in that little head. Just sing me the '*Di provenza*' once more, and we won't quarrel our last day together."

Meta, with some effort, complied; and the sweet, clear voice warbled out the touching, plaintive song, with a yearning tenderness for the "pleasant days" that were gone forever. There were tears in Miss Clifton's eyes when the last note died away, and Monsieur had recourse to his long-stemmed pipe as a solace. The parting was not mentioned again, though the three sat together until the picnic party came noisily and gleefully forward to remind them of the inviting luncheon set out under the trees in the grove.

On the following day, Meta left Glencove in the old-fashioned, lumbering stage. Very bitter tears were shed as the last basket and parcel were deposited on the seat; and the driver, who had very little sentiment, and had stood nervously watching the lengthy adieux, assured Mr. Leslie that it was time to be off.

If parting is "sweet sorrow," we have never found it so. One of life's sadnesses is, to make pleasant friends who grow into our every-day

interests and become a part of the sunshine of existence, only, when the "pleasant days" have grown very necessary to our happiness, to be separated by the most impossible barriers and scattered widely through the world, never again to recover just the same nearness and oneness of soul. Which of us has not experienced the disappointment that follows a visit to old familiar scenes? The one desire of the homesick heart, cherished as a greater blessing than those we have in possession, has been to go back from the innumerable cares of noontide to the sweet freshness of the careless morning; to touch the hands and hear the voices that made up the happiness of youth; to rest under the old roof-tree, and look on the same green grass and waving branches, and even to sit in the quaint old chairs. We go back, and the vision is dispelled. Our cherished dreams cannot stand against the searching light of change and decay. If the voices and hands are left us, there is some new tone or touch that makes us know ourselves strangers; for other ties and the march of years have imparted a querulousness and a hardness to both, of which they are quite as unconscious as we are of the change in ourselves.

And so with the old home. It may have stood the winds and rains of time, but the welcoming

faces at the windows are gone. The old door creaks on its hinges, and the steps are worn, and everything looks like decay; while strange people come out to gaze at you for your sentiment, and you go away with a sigh from the painful shadow of what has been to you such a glorious reality in the past. You have no desire, now, to go over the threshold and sit in the wainscoted room. You feel quite sure that there are no quaint chairs, and fire-screens, and bright brass fender, which was once your fairy-land for shapes. You have a mournful recollection that the sweet mother-face no longer holds its place over the mantel, but has gone away, long ago, to the possession of your elder brother, and can never be again the guardian spirit of the old parlor.

Perhaps it is better so; else life would hold too many precious things, and we should not yearn for that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. If these frail tenements endured forever, and we had no change nor decay to mourn, would we ever think of our Father's house at all? The heart is so prone to grasp and cherish only the tangible, that the hard lesson is wisely ordained, that partings and "pieces of rings" and "snatches of songs" so often remind us that *here* we "have no continuing city."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"DRAY, draw the curtain, Meta; the sun makes my head ache. There! You needn't make the room as dark as pitch! I said the curtain, not the blinds! Who can see to read now, I wonder? Félicie, go over there and see what *you* can do! *Of course*, my lace will have to be put off, if Meta *will* be so stupid!"

So spoke Florry Wallace impatiently, from the depths of her soft pillows on the lounge, where she was wasting the long summer afternoon over a new novel. Félicie was busily sewing some delicate lace in the neck of a gossamer party dress, to be worn that evening by the beautiful lounger; and Meta sat at the window, writing a lengthy epistle to Miss Clifton, scarcely conscious of the hot sunshine, that made Florry's

head ache, in the pleasure of telling her friend the secret thoughts of her busy brain. This was one of Florry's nervous days, and nothing suited her. Félicie had exhausted her ingenuity in the mysteries of sewing lace in a dress, and sighed despairingly at the peevish orders, so impossible to execute.

"There! I declare you've done it wrong for the sixth time," said Florence, tossing over the lace robe contemptuously when the blinds were arranged to her satisfaction. "I don't believe you gave a bit of attention to Sistine's instructions in Paris, though I paid such an enormous sum for you. Félicie, you French people have not a particle of gratitude! Don't you know it's as old as the hills to gather ruffles? Give me the thimble and needle this minute! No! not *yours!* Do you think I would wear your thimble, *really*, Félicie?"

The French maid murmured something very low in her own language, and looked very humble; but the little black eyes flashed, nevertheless. While Florry was interested in the matter of her laces, she vouchsafed to give Félicie a few hints, and, when she had started the ruffle in the right direction, lay back again on her pillows, and took up the book she had thrown down on the floor. A few minutes' silence ensued, the

scratching of Meta's pen being the only sound; and for awhile Florry's brow was unruffled. But presently she began turning and sighing, after the manner of all nervous people, and finally threw down the novel again. Meta was culprit now.

"Meta, whom on earth are you writing to? I declare, it's the most disagreeable thing in the world to hear a pen go scratch, scratch, when your head aches. What sense is there in writing such volumes to that lame woman? and I don't believe you've even looked at the dress you're going to wear to-night. Pray, stop that everlasting scratching! I won't have a nerve left."

Meta had stopped at the first word, feeling very impatient at being interrupted in the middle of a sentence, and held the offending pen over the inkstand. As Florry's cross tone increased, she was conscious of a determination to go on writing, in spite of it; but Miss Clifton's last letter, with its striking sentences, lay before her eyes, and she could not be oblivious to some lines staring her reproachfully in the face:

"You speak of the trials of an irritable temper. My dear Meta, pray reflect that Florence may have many temptations to crossness that you can never understand. Have you not said

that you do not remember being ill in your life? Then, are you a just judge of Florence, whose daily life is one of weary, nervous depression — "

Meta read no further. Had she really been so selfish and unkind as to write to Winny of Florry's faults? It was even so, yet she had not been struck with this view of the question when the hasty letter, to which this was an answer, was penned. Now she abruptly closed her desk, and came over to Florry's couch, laying her hand with sudden tenderness on the blue-veined forehead, and gazing with a pang of self-reproach in the beautiful face, so unearthly in its frail loveliness. There was a crimson spot on each of the fair cheeks, and an unnatural light in the bright eyes.

"Poor Florry, does your head ache very badly?" asked Meta, sympathizingly.

"Oh, awfully," sighed Florence, wearily; "and I declare, between Félicie's stupidity and your old scratching pen, I am nearly distracted. How will I ever get my hair dressed in time to-night?"

"Suppose you stay up-stairs? I don't like it very much, but I will receive the people, if you say so."

"Who ever heard of such foolishness?" exclaimed Florry, pettishly. "I believe you were

cut out for an old maid. Do you think mamma would let you receive, when you haven't 'come out' yet? When you have gone through a course of professors and private lessons, it will be quite time enough to make your *début.* Pray don't talk as if you were brought up in the back-woods!"

"I thought mamma wished me to appear in the drawing-room to-night? Can I really stay here, if I wish it?"

"What a goose! Do, Meta, act as if you had *one* grain of sense! Of course, you can go down — *must* go down! People will think very strange if mamma keeps you away from our own parties, but you can't go anywhere else. There! Don't talk any more about it, please. Hand me that jewel-box in my top drawer, like a good child. I believe it would make me feel better to look it over, and see if that Félicie has put the powder on my pearl set. Don't tumble my things, though. Here! get the key out of my work-box. *Can't* you find it? Oh, dear! I wish people had eyes that knew how to see. Why, it's right before your face! Well! I'm thankful you managed to find it!"

Meta took the key, which was not in the box, but under a pile of books on the table, and opened the sacred "top drawer." It was in per-

fect order, and the richly inlaid jewel-box — a gem of itself — was in full view. Relieved to find it so easily, she relocked the drawer, and went over to the lounge with the rich casket. Florry took the tiniest of keys off her watch-chain, and opened the treasure, tossing over the elegant and fragile contents with such reckless fingers that Meta shuddered for their fate. The pearls being chalked to her satisfaction, and a very elegant diamond necklace found in its proper place, Florry's good humor returned, and she graciously exhibited the treasures she had purchased abroad to the unsophisticated eyes of her sister.

"Why don't you wear the diamonds to-night?" asked Meta, turning the beautiful jewels over on her palm, admiringly. "They are so lovely, Florry."

"Of course, they are lovely! Mamma had them reset for me in Paris; but do you think I have no better taste than to wear diamonds at *my* age, in full dress? Mamma *gave* these to me. They were her mother's, you know; but, of course, she wears them herself always, and I only look at them now. There! I believe you'd better put them away, while I try to take a nap. Don't shake the powder off my pearls, whatever you do! Will you ring for Félicie to come and

fan me? She went out as soon as she saw I wasn't thinking of her. What a plague they all are, to be sure!"

Later in the evening, when Mr. Wallace's handsome apartments were filled with the wealth and fashion of the city, and the enlivening music was pealing out an invitation to the dance, Florence, with no trace of the afternoon's peevishness, stood gracefully receiving her own and her mother's guests. More than one stopped to look in the exquisitely beautiful face, so brilliantly fair and bewitching, with gracious smiles chasing over the rosy lips, and a most unnatural light in the large dark eyes; but few paused to think how soon these frail flowers wither and die. The fleecy folds of her lace dress, and the perfect taste with which everything she wore fitted her style and figure, kept the idle world from suspecting the exceeding delicacy of her frame. The slight cough was scarcely noted. Mrs. Wallace had never been prouder of her lovely daughter, as the unqualified admiration accorded her was heard on all sides; even Meta, who gladly kept out of the confusion around Florry, could do little besides admire the perfect face and even more perfect manners of her sister. Every one acknowledged the *début* a great success, and Florence's title to the adulation of her little world indisputable.

FLORENCE'S PARTY. Page 254.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE winter season had opened brilliantly. Mrs. Wallace and Florence were kept in a perpetual whirl, with no greater control of their convenience or time than the veriest slave; yet this was pleasure. The excitement of such a life was too much for the delicate constitution of the poor little belle, while her home-life consisted of peevish, restless days spent upon the lounge reading unhealthy books; and she grew frailer and more painfully fair as time wore on. But no one thought of this. Mrs. Wallace, wrapped up in her worldly existence, scarcely ever seeing her children during the "season," except when Florry met her at dinner or luncheon, or when there were engagements for the daylight, thought very little of why such feverish hands and hectic cheeks had

become a part of her beautiful belle. The world admired and praised the beauty; what else could she ask? And so it was that those little feet were always incased in thin shoes or slippers, and the alabaster shoulders nightly exposed to chance draughts. Very often the poorly-clad feet stood in the snow, waiting for the carriage on an opera night, or the poor lungs, crowded out of their proper place by the laws of dress, panted and sighed for a breath of pure air, while Florry laughed and chatted in some heated room, where disease, and languor, and future misery were breathed in so fatally; and without a thought. Meta saw none of all this. Her evenings were devoted to letters and study — often to what she called a "good old practice" — when the family were engaged at balls and parties. She saw very little more of her mother and sister than if they had been living in separate houses; and of her father still less. Mr. Wallace of late years was seized with a mania for speculating, and it had not improved his domestic qualities. Meta was shocked to find him morose and fretful, so reserved that it seemed impossible to penetrate to his inner self, and seemingly absorbed in some engrossing thought that interfered with every relation of life. Things went on in the thoughtless household pretty much as they had

ever done. There was the same reckless expenditure and useless luxury; as if care was only a name, and human misery a mere theory, used by eloquent pulpit orators to frighten money out of the congregational pocket.

Meta, living with her dear absent friends in thought and through the medium of writing, rejoiced in her quiet life. The temptations she had dreaded were yet distant, and, on the whole, it was not so hard to be good when there was no one to interfere with her tastes. She spent her mornings with the various teachers employed for her, and cultivated her voice, with no further oversight on the mother's part than the first anxiety that Meta's professors should be strictly fashionable. Mrs. Wallace never inquired as to her progress, and was utterly unconscious that her daughter possessed an accomplishment. She was thankful that her manners, though they "needed a little polishing, to be sure," were not countrified, and her face really pretty, when not seen near Florry's; that was all. Meta sang and studied, and was quite happy, left to herself; and so time fled, unnoted.

One night, as Meta sat over her cosy fire, reading a very pleasant book, she heard her father's step on the stairs. It was an unusual

hour for Mr. Wallace to come home, for it was a club night; but Meta thought nothing of it, and, after listening until she heard her mother's door open and close, went back to her delightful reading. The sound of regular footsteps in the adjoining chamber came across her ears once in a while; but after about an hour they ceased, and there was no sound in the house until past midnight, when the familiar chatting and laughing that announced the return of the revelers disturbed Meta over the last pages of the book she had lost her rest to finish.

When Florence appeared in the doorway — a vision of loveliness — Meta sprang up to greet her, and was assisting the sleepy Félicie in unrobing the tired beauty, when a sudden and appalling scream came from Mrs. Wallace's room. Rushing past her startled sister, with dressing-gown and hair flying, Meta ran quickly to her mother's door, the dreadful screams still piercing her brain. Throwing the door open hurriedly, she saw her mother, resplendent in jewels and velvet, crouching on the rug before the great easy-chair that was always placed at Mr. Wallace's reading-table, near the fire, and where he now sat with head resting on his hand. The drop-light was turned up high, and an open book lay on the reading-table; but the hand that lay

so listlessly on the leaves was cold and limp, and the wide-open eyes stared blindly. This was a horrible explanation of those fearful screams, but Meta divined it all at a glance. Mr. Wallace was dead.

We pass over the harrowing scenes of that night, never to be forgotten by any of his children. Florence, carried away by terror and alarm, fainted at the first awful realization of their loss. Meta was roused from her own despairing efforts to soothe and comfort her mother, by the fall of the poor, frail body in the doorway, as Florence sank into a deathlike unconsciousness that seemed to give little hope of awaking.

In looking back upon this first view of sudden death, Meta could never remember how they had lived through the hours that followed; yet the night passed, and the morning dawned.

The physician who had watched and tended the family for years, with others skilled in their art, came sympathizingly to proffer aid; but there was no healing to be found. Mr. Wallace had expired in a stroke of paralysis, and no man dared to offer comfort or hope to the bereaved.

Friends poured in with the morrow, to console and sympathize with the widow and her children; but so artificial had been the life of the house-

hold that there were not a few whose curiosity to see how they bore the blow, or a morbid fancy to witness the proof that "in the midst of life we are in death," was the moving cause in the visit.

Then came the grand funeral of the millionaire, with its nodding plumes and long line of carriages; the mournful anthem, and the sorrowful procession along the aisle of the handsome church; and the solemn utterance of those words of mighty import, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Then the crowd went on its way, and the world made its comments, and Edward Wallace's dream of life and place among men was over.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN examination into Mr. Wallace's affairs by the executors created another nine days' wonder, and disclosed very startling facts. Of the wealth in which these children of fortune so blindly trusted, a bare living remained, and the widow sat shorn of her strength, for she had trusted in the multitude of her riches. Edward, who had been on an expensive Southern and Western tour for some weeks, was summoned hastily by one of the tender-hearted executors, in order that the shock to Mrs. Wallace might be softened as much as possible; but the old gentleman went away indignant and angry at the expressions of disgust and blame with which the only son discussed so bitterly his father's failure. How the immense fortune had been wasted, none ever knew; the

secret of his losses went down to the grave with the unfortunate man, who had died in the midst of his luxuries, alone.

We will not attempt to portray Mrs. Wallace's consternation when the fact was revealed to her that she had lost all that made up her existence. It was her first realization of the truth that man's life "fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not;" and the dire, overwhelming fate crushed her proud spirit to the earth.

To Florry, the idea of poverty was one of simple degradation. Small economies, and the absence of those luxuries which were so necessary to her being, never occurred to her; she could grasp no medium between wealth and absolute destitution. No idea of gratitude that enough for sustenance had been spared them came into her heart. She had heard there were people who managed to live decently on a few hundreds, but she did not believe it. She had seen wretched humanity in rags and tatters too often to question its existence, but she had been taught to regard these people as impostors, and so had grown to look upon hunger and nakedness as a sort of abstract imposition itself; perhaps even greater than the miserable creatures who fished out their meals from the gutters of those dreadful streets she feared to enter.

When Meta heard the truth, that "plate, carriage, horses, houses, everything must be sold, and the family come down from fifty thousand a year to just eight hundred," she was perhaps as much startled as the rest, but not overcome. She could not but think of the repining spirit she had indulged at the temptation now forever removed, and was self-rebuked and humbled at what He who knew her best had chosen for her. Sometimes the fear would come that she would find duty much harder with so much bitterness and murmuring around her than with the wealth she had considered such a burden; but she did not suffer the thought to gain possession of her mind, and battled bravely with the natural regret at giving up the delightful home she had learned to appreciate. It was hard to "fight the good fight" when the gay banners were trailed in dust, and the proud forces so often routed, bleeding and almost ready to avoid the conflict; but there was a strength on which she relied that did not desert her here. Even when disheartened by foes without and fears within, she trusted to that mighty hand and unsearchable wisdom that giveth not always the battle to the strong; and so, through prayerful faith, she found grace to help in time of need, and strength to subdue the unruly mutiny of her heart.

Florry found it very hard to submit.

"Mamma!" she cried, passionately, in the first family council after the startling news, "mamma! I shall not give up my harp, nor my jewels, nor my silks! I never can."

"Oh, no, of course not!" sneered Edward; "but I must give up *my* cigars, *my* club, *my* opera-box! Is that your tune, Miss Selfishness?"

"I am sure, children," cried Mrs. Wallace, fretfully, "*I* have to sacrifice most of all! You are young, and can outlive this disgrace; but fancy what *I* shall suffer to endure the horrors of one of those dismal brick houses down town."

"I'd rather die!" exclaimed Florry, crying; "yes, I would, Meta, so you needn't look so shocked! I would just as soon be dead, as live as far down as Bond street, even; and mamma says Waverley place, or Clinton either, would be out of the question. Don't look so solemn! I declare you'd vex the patience of a saint!"

The excitement of contradiction had brought a glow to her face, making her loveliness so unearthly that Edward paused in his moody walk through the room to admire it.

"If she'd just marry a million, now," he thought, suddenly, "some of this ugly business might be managed."

Florry had now begun to cough, and a fearful paroxysm, such as no one but Meta had ever seen before, racked the frail frame, making the thick beads stand out on her forehead. Mrs. Wallace arose in alarm, and held a glass of water to the quivering lips.

"Why can't you let her alone?" she asked of Meta, querulously. "She hasn't coughed like that for an age, and it's nothing but your absurd contradictions."

Meta did not answer, but her heart was full.

"O mother, mother," was her secret thought; "has it come to this, and you are blind still? Poor Florry!"

Very tenderly she bathed Florry's brow when the paroxysm had passed off. She was thinking of a sunny head lying low "under the daisies," in the village church-yard so far away.

"Thank you," said Florence, graciously, as she revived and straightened her hair; "only I would not be such a cry-baby, Meta. Mamma! she is actually in tears!"

"It's not surprising, considering our trials," said Mrs. Wallace, going back to her woes. "And now, Edward, quit that everlasting whistling, and be rational enough to help me make out this inventory of my private possessions; will you?"

And so, through innumerable disputes and recriminations, the sorrow was met, and the downfall endured in bitter complainings.

In a few weeks after Mr. Wallace's death, his family were comfortably installed in their new residence; a plain brick tenement on Bond street, where there were no servants to answer Mrs. Wallace's silver bell, and no Félicie to dress Florence's beautiful hair. But Meta's deft fingers were so skillful in frizzing and braiding, that after a little practice she was declared almost equal to the renowned "Sistine," who had been Florry's authority on such matters in Paris. Mrs. Walker, though she had begged to be allowed to share the family misfortunes, was too expensive a luxury as housekeeper of so small an establishment; and, moreover, Mrs. Wallace shrunk from every one who could recall those "better days" that were now the source of her vain repinings.

The world had said all it had to say, and shrugged its shoulders resignedly over the downfall of the Wallace pride, and now the long-idolized leaders of society had sunk out of its great whirl, and, before many months had passed, were spoken of as indifferently, by many who had been glad to own the prestige of intimacy,

as though they had never existed in the sunlight of the "upper ten." Perhaps their own sensitiveness may have helped to bring about this state of things, for there were many sincere offers of sympathy and acts of true friendliness at first. But even the best disposed hesitated to incur the severe, almost rude repulse that awaited any advances which savored of pity, and were therefore an offense to the nostrils of pride. Mrs. Wallace resented as impertinence what was meant in all kindliness of heart; and it was no wonder that she had cause to mourn, in bitterness of soul, the instability and self-interest that formed the basis of summer friendships.

With Meta's friends it was very different. In the first great agony of spirit, they had cheered and soothed with the tenderest love, pouring balm in upon the bruised heart and quivering nerves, and leading the rebellious will to the only true source of comfort — reliance upon God, whose chastening is all inflicted in love.

"'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,'" wrote Miss Clifton, in one of her earnest Christian letters. "My poor, dear child, do not give up to rebellious despair because the trial of your faith is sent in so different a form from what you had imagined. God's face is not turned away, if you will but think of it; and though it

sometimes *seems* hard that these grievous burdens are imposed, we must have faith enough to believe that all things work together for good, and that what is strange and blurred to our darkened vision *here*, shall surely be revealed face to face. Do we ever doubt that God is watching over to defend us in our mortal nights, when we lie down to sleep trustfully, with no fear of what may come to us in the silence and unconsciousness of slumber? Then why should he not be with us still, though we cannot see him, in that dark night of spiritual sorrow when the awfulness of a great bereavement is upon us, and the soul faints for fear? Ah, Meta! surely he *is* there, else were our faith indeed a vain thing! Do not forget that in the helplessness of such sorrows we have gone back to the weakness of childhood, when the brain is striving to grasp life's mysteries, and we are forced to yield to the guidance of the mother's knowledge, though we cannot understand why such things be. Just so must we follow when he bids us walk with him through the dim paths of his mysterious dispensations, clinging to that hand as the wondering child to its mother's wisdom, and going forth into the maze, believing that what we know not now, we shall know hereafter."

And so was Meta stayed and comforted with

the tender friendship that brought such goodly fruit in her time of need. The pleasure once found in her long letters to Winny was now the chief solace when more than ordinary depression weighed upon her heart. She was finding it very hard to meet the daily trials, petty and trivial as they seemed when summed up; the annoyances of making a very little seem a great deal to the fastidious mother and sister, who gave up the whole responsibility of the household to her; trying, out of their limited means, to furnish Florry with delicacies and Edward with the ready cash he so selfishly and thoughtlessly demanded; and keeping up a show of gentility about the small establishment, with no aid but her own inventions and energy. Edward from the first had refused to have anything to do with the finances, and it came about very naturally that Meta's shoulders were fitted to the burden, and must bear it. The small income was regularly paid by their kind business friend, who pitied the widow's helplessness, though he scowled at Edward's indolent scorn at the idea of assuming the direction of affairs, and reprimanded him very shortly for a "lazy, selfish fellow."

All of this had little effect, as a matter of course; and the kind-hearted old gentleman

saw that he must either assume charge of the finances, or very soon "Wallace's family would be on the parish, sir!" as he indignantly said to one of his business friends. Mr. Wallace's old associates had offered Edward a very excellent situation as soon as the extent of their losses was known; but, after an instant's glance of intense scorn in the face of the friend who had been bold enough to make the proposal, Edward indignantly rejected it.

"Do you think my father's son would stand behind a counter in a dry goods store?" he asked, angrily. "No, sir! If you had given me a situation in a bank or on 'change, or a railroad presidency, or something respectable and honorable, which would not be a stain on the name; but a clerkship — bah!"

The amazed merchant, who fancied he was doing something very friendly to meddle in the affairs of such a worthless fellow at all, did not conceal his anger at the scornful, injured tone; and, for once in his life, Edward Wallace was shown his character in its true light. He was not benefited by the lecture, however, and the language of his reply was so insolent and insulting to gray hairs, that the substantial interest and kindly feeling of his father's old friend was forever estranged from the family.

CHAPTER XXX.

"A LADY in the parlor, mum, as wishes to see yez," announced the raw Irish girl, the Wallaces' maid-of-all-work, in her rich brogue.

Meta looked up from the book she was reading aloud to Florry, and repeated, absently, "A lady?"

"Yes, mum; sure, an' she'd want to come in here, wither or no —"

"For pity's sake, go and see who it is, Meta," interrupted Florence, impatiently. "That girl will be the death of me, I know she will! If somebody can't teach her the English language, I'll go to the door myself; the odious creature makes me nervous. Suppose Nina Appleton happened to call!"

Meta knew that this was scarcely a proba-

bility; but, as it always furnished Florry with an excuse to make an exertion, she never denied the fact that Nina *might* come, and Florry lived on in hope. Poor beauty! this was one of her bad days. The racking cough and feverish flush were increased by every little cross, and no one ventured to oppose any of her countless whims. Meta attempted no defense of poor Catherine's undeniable brogue, but, laying aside her book, went out in the narrow entry to see who the rare visitor might be, leaving the perplexed Irish girl to go through a rigid lecture on the proper pronunciation of words. Florry was growing really interested in her curious task, when she heard a sudden uproar at the door.

"Bless the sweet face of ye!" cried a hearty voice, in almost as rich a brogue as Catherine's. "Kiss your old Bridget, my blessed lamb! Sure, did ye think I was forgettin' you in your trouble, when my own heart has been bleedin' and longin' for ye so long? And to think that stupid creature of a girl wouldn't let me rush to ye, the minute I found the house!"

"Shut the door," cried Florry, hurriedly, to the girl, "and go away! I believe we will have an Irish regiment here before the day is out. The idea of Meta hugging and kissing that great

fat Bridget! Oh, me! now she'll go crazy over her again, and I won't have a soul to read to me! Mamma drawls awfully; Meta is the only person that can read with a particle of tune in her voice."

Meanwhile, Meta *was* hugging Bridget rapturously, listening through her tears to the enthusiastic delight of her old nurse, her praise of the sweet, girlish face, and the extravagant assertion that "never was Florry a whit more beautiful than her own baby was now." The mention of Florry reminded her that she had been left unceremoniously, and was possibly cross; so, half leading, half dragging Bridget along, she opened the dining-room door, where they had been sitting, and led the honest, faithful creature, in the most matter-of-fact way, to Florry's lounge.

"Sure, an' is it sick ye are?" exclaimed Bridget, dusting a chair in her usual way, before seating herself.

"How do you do, Bridget?" said Florence, holding out a languid hand. "Yes, I'm sick, but don't ask me how I feel, for I hate it."

"Dear Florry's cough troubles her," said Meta, gently, giving Bridget a warning look.

"Sure, it's smoke mullen ye must," the woman said, more for an excuse to hide her surprise at

the wreck before her than to really venture on advising.

"Smoke mullen!" cried Florry, with a gesture of disgust; "I think I see myself smoking *anything!*"

"Me mother tried it," said Bridget, not resenting the tone as she once would have done. Though Florence had never been a favorite, she was truly shocked and grieved to see her in such an evident decline, and a feeling of tenderness that she had never expected to display for her old enemy in the nursery filled her eyes with tears.

But though Florry resented as an insult the bare mention of such a remedy for *her* cough, and turned her back on Bridget, pretending to read, she was nevertheless quite interested in the conversation that ensued; for the old nurse had much to relate.

"I've had me ups and me downs," she said, resignedly; "but the Lord has blessed me with strength and health. These arms has never failed me yet, and I've never to say gone without bread and a place to lay my head at night. But I've had me ups and me downs!"

Florry here glanced at Meta with a queer expression, as if she felt inclined to repeat for Bridget's benefit the lecture recently given to

the house-girl; and Meta, fearing she might be tempted to do it, hurriedly changed the subject by asking how it was that Bridget had never found them out until now.

"Oh, I heard when ye came back from school," she replied, "but I was just going for a sitiwation in the South as was offered me, and I was forced off, like. I didn't stay there very long; the climate didn't agree with me, and the ways was different. Well! when I set foot in New York again, and went to the old place to see ye, sure, the people was strangers, and no one could tell me aught of ye."

"What!" cried Florry, sharply; "have they forgotten, so soon, who and what the Wallaces are?"

"Ay! it's the way of the world, honey," said Bridget, soothingly, as she hastily skipped that part of her story, and said, contentedly, "Well! I found ye, though, for all, and the Lord be praised for it. But the afternoon's waning, sure, and I must be off with me;" rising reluctantly, and putting her hand in a capacious pocket, doubtfully.

"My baby," she cried to Meta, blushing, as she drew out a large paper parcel from the said pocket — "my baby, you had a sweet tooth, I remember me! Here's a morsel of candy — caramels —"

"Caramels!" repeated Florry, eagerly. "Oh, dear, I am so glad! Do give me one, Meta!"

Bridget threw the parcel on the lounge, in a relieved way, avoiding Meta's eyes, that were looking thankfully in her face, and helped Florry to a selection of the candy. Then, adding two oranges to the gift, she drew her shawl about her, and bade Florry good-bye.

"Good-bye, Bridget," said the invalid, graciously; "it was real good of you to bring me some oranges. I've been wanting some ever so long, and didn't know exactly what I *was* craving."

Bridget did not venture to say that her last shilling had been expended entirely for the benefit of "her baby;" she had not the heart to take away the evident satisfaction of the sick girl, who was so eagerly turning over the candy and smelling the fragrant fruit.

"You'll not be mad with old Bridget?" whispered the nurse to Meta, as they stood at the door.

"Angry, indeed!" sobbed the poor child, laying her weary head on the old resting-place. "O Bridget, God bless your tenderness and thoughtful love! Oh, I have been so unhappy — so miserable!"

"I see, I see, my darlint, but God will help ye

bear it. Sure, I know it's hard, but don't give up! And that poor one beyond there," nodding in Florry's direction, "she'll not be long among ye. Bear with her, Meta, bear with her — poor lamb! And if ye ever need money, and your old Bridget can work her fingers off for ye, ye shall have it! Hush! don't cry! it makes my heart bleed;" and Bridget said good-bye hurriedly, in the midst of sobs, as Florry's voice, calling Meta plaintively, came wafted out to the door.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"HAVE you found anything to do, yet, Edward?" asked his mother, one day, at their plain dinner, when Meta announced the fact that it yet lacked six days before the month's allowance would be paid, and there were only two dollars in her purse. Edward was standing at the fire, coolly lighting a cigar, while the rest sat around the small table. "Have you really tried to get employment?" continued Mrs. Wallace. "Do come and sit at the table like a gentleman, and quit smoking while we are at dinner."

"Certainly, madam," said Edward, throwing the coal back in the fire; "I shall always endeavor to be a gentleman, though I confess these surroundings make it a difficult position. No,

thank you! — no dinner. I can't eat beefsteak and rice; never could."

"Why, Edward!" cried Meta, reproachfully.

"Yes, I know what you want to say, sis! 'Better a dinner of herbs,' etc.; I'm familiar with the quotation, thank you. But give *me* the 'stalled ox,' if you please! I never had primitive tastes."

"No one wants you to eat," said his mother, severely; "but I would thank you to answer my question, Edward. Have you *tried* to find work?"

"What shall I do, mamma? 'I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.' You needn't open your eyes, Meta! I know *that* comes out of the Bible!" And he laughed heartily at this witty speech. Presently he went on, for no one cared to comment upon his rudeness:

"By the way, *ma mère*, old Wilson *did* offer me a place, but *such* a place! How would you like to see me behind the cloak counter at Arnold's?"

"Arnold's!" repeated Mrs. Wallace, a flush mounting to her face quickly.

"I thought you wouldn't approve of dry goods, exactly," said Edward, composedly taking up his hat; "none of us like to disgrace our name —"

"It's no disgrace to work for your mother," cried Meta, impulsively.

"Ah, indeed, little miss! So, that's the way you talk to your elders? Of course, it's just like a girl's reasoning and selfishness. *I* am to be sacrificed on a counter, that you and Florry may be dressed in furbelows and eat candy."

Meta made no reply, though her face was flushed, and she felt herself giving way to an old-time fit of temper. With a great effort she repressed the sharp words that were trembling on her lips, and set to work to preach down her heart.

"Mamma," she said, mildly, "I have tried very hard not to annoy you with these cares, but I find it impossible to keep within our allowance. Poor Florry must have her cordials, and Edward *will* smoke."

"If Mr. Clay would lend us —" began Mrs. Wallace, doubtfully.

"Oh, no! Don't let us come to that, yet, mamma."

Edward laughed rudely, as she paused, blushing.

"So, that's your game, is it? Going on the grand independent line? I'd like to know how you propose to manage it! Always thought there was a screw loose in your composition,

somewhere, but this *is* rich, to be sure! What do you expect to eat until next month's pay-day?"

"Just what you do!" retorted Meta, impatiently.

"Ah, indeed, young one! I have an account at Delmonico's, it's true; but you don't propose joining my dinners, do you?"

The tears came into his sister's eyes as he rudely tapped her chin with his cigar; but she did not allow her angry spirit to gain ascendency. If she could not "strengthen the brethren," she would at least do nothing to retard their progress, and schooled herself to Edward's taunting, provoking manners by never encouraging such conversations. The careless fellow, seeing there was nothing to be gained, took up his hat and thrust a few cigars in his pocket. When he had reached the door, he drew a letter from his side pocket, saying, carelessly, as he threw it to Meta:

"There! I've had that in my pocket a day or two, I believe! It's yours, Miss Sobersides! I hope you'll find your week's rations inside." And, whistling a light opera air, he walked off, leaving a long line of tobacco smoke behind him.

Meta, glancing eagerly at her letter, saw that

the handwriting was Winny's, and laid it aside for future enjoyment, thinking that, now Edward had taken himself off, she had best pursue the serious subject in hand. Accordingly she began earnestly to endeavor to convince her mother that something must be done, some new plan devised for regulating the household expenditure and curtailing the outlay. But Mrs. Wallace, irritated at Edward's speech and the necessity of facing such disagreeable facts, would not discuss the matter at all, and bade Meta, peevishly, to read her letter and be done with it.

Knowing how useless it would be to attempt remonstrance, the perplexed young housekeeper drew a long breath and broke the seal, glancing over the closely-written pages with an inward thankfulness that there was one friend whose ear was always open to her troubles, and whose counsels brought help and comfort when she was most tried. As she read on, one paragraph brought such a glad surprise that she made a loud exclamation of delight.

"What does she say?" asked Mrs. Wallace, languidly. "I believe you really like that woman better than you do your own people, Meta."

"O mamma!" cried Meta, her enthusiasm somewhat clouded by this speech. "Indeed, I

could not help being very glad to hear that our dear old Monsieur Jean is coming to New York to live. Think how joyful it will be!"

"I can't see anything joyful about it. Remember, Meta, that your circumstances have materially changed since you left Glencove. I am surprised that your pride does not rebel against seeing an old friend under *this* roof!"

"Monsieur Jean never would think of that," said Meta, smiling at the idea of the old Frenchman's friendship depending upon her surroundings; but she did not express her vehement delight again, contenting herself with reading over and over again the intelligence that gave her so much pleasure. Miss Clifton had written as follows:

We are all greatly distressed at the certainty of losing our dear professor. He has been often solicited by foreign friends who have established themselves in New York at various times, to leave the retirement of Glencove, and make a future for himself in the city. The inducements offered have had no weight heretofore, but of late madame and himself have found a perpetual source of discord, and he is about to leave. Entreaty has had no effect, and Mr. Leslie, sorely disturbed, has no alternative but to accept his resignation. He was lately offered a very lucrative post in New York, and I have no doubt will make a name for himself; for his talent amounts almost to a genius for music. What we shall do without him is hard to imagine; but I shall not be selfish enough to repine at his improved fortunes, nor to grieve over a piece of news that I know is such a source of pleasure to you. . . .

When the frugal dinner was over, and Mrs. Wallace composedly taking her afternoon nap, in forgetfulness of the fact that Meta's purse held just two dollars, our young friend drew her chair to the window, rejoicing that for awhile she might have her precious letter all to herself. But she did not long enjoy the quiet of the little back room.

"Miss Meta, sure, an' there's no tay at all, at all, in the house, and Miss Florry is just bidding me make her a cup, strong as lye," announced Catherine, opening the door, and showing her perplexed face.

"No tea?" said Meta, absently; "are you quite sure, Catherine?"

"Faith, an' I am, miss. I took the last this morning for the missus. What's to be done, an' it please you?"

"Why, run to the grocery at the corner, of course, and get it as soon as you can. Miss Florry mustn't be kept waiting. How much is it?"

"Two dollar the pound, for the kind yez drinks."

Meta came out of her reverie at the announcement. Two dollars for a single pound of tea! What would become of her? Florry dearly loved the beverage, and would drink only the best and

strongest, never troubling herself to find out where or how the money was obtained for the luxury — which it had now grown to be. If her whim was opposed, the probabilities were strongly in favor of a coughing spell, that always ended in excessive weakness.

With a sigh Meta went up to her little bureau and took out the purse. Selecting one of the four shining half-dollars, she ran down-stairs, and hurriedly put it into Catherine's hand.

"I hates to trouble you, mum," said the girl, hesitatingly; "but if yez could give me a shilling more? There's not the first morsel o' butter."

"Never mind," said Meta, wearily; "we'll do without that now, Catherine."

She went back to her station at the dining-room window, but the letter from Glencove was a secondary matter now. For the first time in many days, her courage gave way under the difficulties she encountered alone and unaided. Edward's taunts and her mother's strange indifference came over her with all their power to wound and perplex, and, bowing her head on the narrow sill, the tears, so bravely kept back, poured forth at last. Florence had grown visibly weaker and more fragile, her cough increasing with every change of weather or, indeed, of

temper. Those who have never kept watch over the sure victims of consumption, seeing the light step grow so languid, and the life gradually but surely fading out of dear, bright eyes, can never imagine the heart-sickness of such vigils. The disease deceives so often with its fatal semblance of health, that it is sometimes hard to believe the fairness and brightness that make up a beauty surpassing the mortal are only the unerring harbingers of a sure decay.

One of Meta's sorest trials was the utter blindness of her mother to Florry's state; the absolute, unquestioning security in which each day, that brought her worshiped darling nearer to the destroyer, was yawned or fretted away, without a thought of that dark cloud so soon to descend upon her life. After a more than ordinary season of suffering to the invalid, she would perhaps groan over the fate that kept Florry tied down to the dull little house, and wonder why she was singled out to bear the sick girl's fretful, unreasoning demands, when she had spoiled her and petted her from babyhood; but no idea of danger ever seemed to cross her mind.

Meta was thinking of all this as she indulged her sorrowful tears; for Florry's cough, sounding so hollow and wretched through the small house,

smote her heart with a foreboding of heavier grief than even these battles with poverty and lack of appreciation had brought. Her shoulders seemed too weak for the burden she carried, and the future looked very dark; but, as she wept on, a feeling of peace that had not followed her most earnest prayers stole over her bowed heart. "When through the deep waters I call thee to go" — surely, she was already testing the promise in the midst of her struggle with the waves! The trust in God's willingness as well as power to give strength for every trial buoyed her up now; a consciousness that, because she did not *need* grace for that certain trouble in the future until it was really present, the grace was withheld, and *not* because God's face was hidden or his strength denied. A streak of light from the setting sun, struggling with the great brick walls around her, made a glory of the narrow window, and streamed into the little room, penetrating to her heart, and imparting warmth and hope where all had been so dismal and sorrowful a moment before. Pressing her face against the window, she looked earnestly upward to the source of that dying sunray that had so brightened the gloomy little back yard and glorified even the brick walls. Lost in thought, her tearful eyes growing brighter as

her musings became less miserable, she was startled by a hand laid suddenly on her shoulder, as Bridget's cheery voice greeted her.

"In tears, my darlint? Sure, what ails my baby now?"

Meta smiled as she bade the old nurse welcome and drew her to a chair; then, taking a little stool at her feet, she laid the tired head on Bridget's knee, and had soon unfolded the extent of her troubles — her difficulties in defraying the household expenses, Florry's increased languor and ill-health, her mother's strange inability to advise and assist in these extremities, and even the present perplexity of making her three remaining half-dollars do work for so many days. Bridget listened sympathizingly, speaking an encouraging word when she could, and pressing the confiding hand when there was nothing she *could* say; and when the tale was told, she whispered hurriedly, as if afraid to give her favorite time for reflection:

"I've a matter of fifteen dollars, saved against a rainy day, Meta, as is yours, if you'll only take it. I thought, deary, you see, it was very presuming-like for me to never look for sickness to come, and I've saved it by little against the ill times —"

"O Bridget! do you think I could do this?"

interrupted Meta, kissing the hard, rough hand that clasped her own. "No! I can't take your money, kind, dear old Bridget, but I thank you a thousand, thousand times." And, greatly overcome at Bridget's sympathizing generosity, Meta sobbed from very thankfulness of heart.

Bridget urged and begged in vain, assuring her that the fifteen dollars was something quite out of her own reach, as she had laid it aside in a friend's hands, with the resolution not to spend a cent of it on herself except for that misty, far-off rainy day. Though appreciating the motive, and much moved at the delicacy with which the entreaties were made, Meta very courageously refused, and Bridget went away with a sad heart.

The next day, as Meta stood absently turning over Mr. Ascher's ring on her finger, revolving the question whether their present necessities released her from her promise always to wear it, and half ashamed of herself for allowing the thought, she was disturbed by a summons from her mother, who had something to show her down-stairs. Mrs. Wallace was standing at the dining-table, looking over a large parcel that had been received from a well-known grocery firm, and very much perplexed to know how it had been purchased.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing, Meta? — tea and coffee, loaf sugar, cheese, crackers, even sardines and pickles. Who on earth sent it?"

At the first glance, Meta was quite sure that she knew the donor, and her eyes filled with tears at the conviction that poor Bridget's fifteen dollars had really found their way to the house. To have told Mrs. Wallace this would have insured the rejection of every article, and the certain wounding of the kind woman's feelings, who had so generously found a way to help her darling without a possibility of refusal; so Meta was forced to keep her convictions to herself, and Mrs. Wallace, seeing Florry's delight at some of the delicacies, persuaded herself that the man had owed Mr. Wallace some money, and was ashamed to pay it back in any other way. Meta, when she heard this solution of the mystery, at once declared that she suspected the source from whence it came, but begged so earnestly not to be asked the secret that her mother did not press the question, and soon other cares absorbed the minor perplexity.

But Meta did not forget. Bridget was overwhelmed with reproachful thanks when they met again, and positively forbidden to make any further purchases, on pain of betrayal to Mrs.

Wallace. Then she was won over, by caresses and tears, to help Meta in a scheme she had in view for the improvement of home affairs, and soon the two were quite interested in sundry small parcels that went backward and forward under the ample folds of Bridget's blanket shawl.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MONSIEUR JEAN came to New York, and was soon a celebrity. Even Mrs. Wallace condescended to be gracious to the clever old Frenchman who took such an interest in her daughter, and who smilingly assured her that Meta's voice was something quite wonderful in its way. The consternation of her family was quite amusing at the first practice insisted on by the professor, even without the aid of a piano. The rich volume of voice filled the little house with melody, and Monsieur Jean clapped his hands in an ecstasy of amused delight at the mother's amazement. Florry was roused from her habitual indifference to such things, and made quite a fuss over her sister's wonderful powers.

"Why, mamma, she is equal to that French

singer with the long name, isn't she?" cried Florry.

Even Edward showed more respect for the "little midge of a thing;" and when Monsieur Jean's enthusiastic musical friends were brought to hear his "nightingale," as he called her, the family delight knew no bounds.

At first Meta was much encouraged at the praise lavished upon her, and Monsieur's assurance that he would find her as many scholars as she wanted, since Mrs. Wallace utterly refused, to his great discomfiture, to countenance his pet scheme of bringing out his *protégée* at some of his own private concerts.

"Why, madame," he said, taking a big pinch of snuff as a relief; "you stand in the way of Meta's fame, her fortune."

"She cannot sing at your concerts, Monsieur. I entirely disapprove of such things for so young a girl."

For once Mrs. Wallace was decided, and Meta's talent was thrown in other channels.

"Hein!" cried Monsieur to one of his friends. "What can we do with these Americans? That child has a voice to bring her a good support. Well! I suppose Madame Wallace too proud. Such folly — so American!"

But, to Monsieur's greater surprise, Meta en-

tirely sided with her mamma, and assured him it was not pride, but an entirely resolute principle, that would keep her from singing even at private concerts at her age; and Monsieur, to console her for the evident disappointment of finding that he was not so sure of scholars as he was of success at his concerts, gave the assurance that he would find as many as she wanted.

But time passed, and no scholars came. It was extremely difficult to persuade people that Meta could know much about the art; and though a few good-natured friends of the professor promised to use their influence, the poor nightingale waited and watched in vain, finding it best to abandon hopes of helping the family by her voice, and going back, almost reluctantly, to the sewing she procured from an establishment for infant outfits, through her faithful Bridget. Meanwhile, Monsieur Jean sent another surprise to the little house on Bond street, in the shape of a pretty piano, which he begged Meta might be allowed to accept. The gift created quite a stir in the household, and a diversity of opinion, as a matter of course. Meta was filled with grateful surprise, and Mrs. Wallace inclined to allow the liberty; but Florry was very indignant.

"What does the old fellow mean by insulting

us?" she cried, passionately. "Does he think we are paupers?"

"If he does, I'm sure he's not wide of the mark," sneered Edward, who was present. "You women never think of anything rational!"

Here followed an angry discussion of several minutes, and the brother, out of patience with Florry's "high-flown ideas," muttered something about sick people being always "cranky."

"In the way! that's what you mean! Never mind, I won't trouble you long."

"Edward, how *could* you?" cried Meta, severely, as Florry sobbed herself into a fit of coughing.

Edward became uneasy and ashamed as he saw the effect of the quarrel. The blue veins swelled on Florry's transparent brow, and when the handkerchief was taken from her lips, and she threw herself on her pillows, exhausted, Meta saw that it was streaked with blood. She quietly took it from her sister's hand, and bathed the flushed face tenderly. Edward, very repentant and miserable — for he too had seen the blood — kissed the tears from the beautiful eyes as he begged her forgiveness for his hasty words. She was the one thing he really loved and admired in life; yet even to her his unkindness

was often as frequent as to those to whom he was perfectly indifferent. The question of the piano was not again discussed, and it was duly accorded the place of honor between the front windows; but Meta's pleasure in the generous gift was sadly marred by the disturbance it had caused.

One day, as she came into the house, after a visit to Bridget, who had not been able to secure the regular work from the sewing establishment, the sound of low sobbing roused her from an anxious reverie over the new trouble. Following the sound, she went hurriedly into the parlor, where Florry, with her head buried in the sofa pillows, was in a state of violent agitation and grief.

"O Florry, what is it?" asked Meta, anxiously, fearing the result of this paroxysm.

"Mamma is out," sobbed Florry, "and that hateful Edward has been frightening me to death, saying I would tempt him to crime, and he'd commit some dreadful act; and all because I asked him for some of Maillard's chocolate. O Meta! I know he had been drinking! He could scarcely stand, and shook his fist in my face. Oh, I wish I was dead and out of everybody's way!"

Meta took one of the delicate hands in hers, and pressed it gently.

"Don't say that, sister! It is very wicked to utter such a wish. Edward will be sorry when he knows what he has done. God help us, if it has come to this!"

The brave heart gave way at this sudden confirmation of her fears that Edward had begun the downward road; and, to Florry's amazement and distress, her stout-hearted sister laid her weary head on the pillow, and cried bitterly.

"Oh, dear!" she said, sighing; "if mamma would only come home! If you are going to cry too, what shall I do? Poor me — poor me!" Then the cough came on with terrible violence, and the blood-streaked handkerchief brought additional terror to Meta's heart, as she held the poor, tired frame in her arms when it was over. Hands with her work to do had no time for wiping away her own selfish tears.

A few hours later Edward came home, his flushed face and heated breath revealing to his astonished mother that a fearful evil indeed had come upon them. A scene of angry recrimination followed, which sent Meta flying up-stairs, to cry in the solitude of her own room, and to pray for strength to meet this new trial. "'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in him,'" she murmured to her sinking courage. "'It is I; be not afraid.'" Christ had stilled fiercer

tempests than these, and given victory in greater conflicts. Why should she doubt him now, when his mercy had sustained her so long? Having sent the trial, surely the solace would come in due time, when his design was worked out. Trembling, downcast, fearful of sorrow in store, Faith came forth triumphant in the struggle, and enabled her to cry out, trustfully: "'He who knows me best shall choose for me!'"

From this time an almost imperceptible change came over Florry. A sadness and silence were stealing over her life, and she had lost some of the fretful, unreasoning spirit that had made it so hard to render her comfortable and cheerful in this life of new habits and deprivations. Meta often sighed to see her turning over the laces and jewels she had saved from the general wreck, brushing the dust off the delicate fabrics, and laying them back in their boxes, with a far-away look in the beautiful, fading eyes. This change brought a great relief to the sorrowful young watcher, who read so well the doom of the frail loveliness before her, as she hoped and trusted that a sense of what awaited her was dawning on the invalid's mind, and gradually weaning her from the poor, trivial, earthly things that once made up her very life.

Yet Florry never asked sympathy, nor did she reveal what was passing in her mind during the long, sad hours of weakness and loneliness; so the sister, full of faith, could only hope on, and pray.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

COURAGE, faint hearts! the darkest hour is truly just before day! However long and dreary the night-watches, rosy dawn is stealing on, as surely as the midnight blackness and weariness are drifting among the shadows. It is hard, sometimes, to wait in patience, and to believe that, beyond the impenetrable mists that blind us with a heavy cloud, the beautiful, sunshiny day is really awaiting us; but it is even so, if we can but bide His time and His ways. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

On a morning when Meta felt as if everything was against her; when, foot-sore and heart-sick, she walked wearily through the busy crowds, whose very energy seemed to mock her; when the work that Bridget had secured could no

longer be found, and home trials had become grievous to bear, the mighty Hand in which she trusted led her faltering steps into paths of pleasantness and peace.

Overcome at the thought that neither music scholars nor work could be found, she had suddenly remembered Alice Agneau, and resolved to seek her old school-friend, and beg of her the sewing she could not obtain elsewhere. The thought filled her with hope; and Alice's enthusiastic reception and eager sympathy when the sorrows were told, lifted a weight off the anxious heart.

"Work?" cried Alice, when she would admit the necessity of her dear Meta's sewing for *her*, "work, my poor darling? Yes! Papa has a dozen shirts, and I have, dear knows how many dresses, and you shall do them all! I wish I could only help you, really." But the relieved Meta assured her, with grateful tears, that she *had* helped her; and then they cried, girl-fashion, in each other's arms, and old Agneau and François made up a huge parcel of confectionery for Florence; and Meta went on her way rejoicing.

Alice, true to her promise, provided as much sewing as her friend could accomplish, even with the utmost diligence, and paid extravagant prices

for every article. Meta doubted whether the sewing was really of such value; but her scruples gave way when mamma and Florry, whom she had won over to the arrangement by dexterous management, "guessed it was all right, as they had paid about twice as much to the dressmakers." So the matter was settled.

One day, as Meta went into Agneau's back room with one of her bundles of work, she jostled against a gentleman who stood at the counter. With a hurried apology she went on, and transacted her business with Alice satisfactorily. On reëntering the store and stopping for a nice morsel for Florry, she observed the same gentleman at the counter; only, now, he came forward, holding out both hands, and smiled down in her face.

"Don't you know me?" he asked, laughing.

"O Mr. Ascher! *is* it you?"

She took in the joyful truth with one glance, and then sank into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and cried with the excess of joy that filled her. Oh, what a solace to her perplexities! what an answer to her prayers!

"This is a nice greeting," said Mr. Ascher, tenderly taking her hands in his. "Why, little one! do you want me to go back to Palestine, that you weep at sight of my old gray beard?"

Meta looked up, smiling and sobbing almost at once.

"*You* know how I thank God for bringing you back at last! That is why I cry — not for grief. Oh, I have so needed your friendship; and now — "

"Come! let's be reasonable, Meta. I've come, and I don't intend to go again in a hurry! So, dry your eyes, and let us walk soberly and rationally homeward, for I don't fancy relating my adventures just here! Stand up, and let me have a look at what Time has made of you! Bless me! I would never have recognized you, Meta! Why, there's nothing left of my fat little friend but her eyes!"

And so, with kind raillery, Mr. Ascher dried the tears, and they walked out to the corner to hail a car, as happy a pair as the great city held that day. On the homeward ride, Mr. Ascher told her that he had been in the country only a few weeks; that news of Mr. Wallace's death had not reached him until just before he left England; that he had learned of their losses when he arrived in New York, and had endeavored to find out their abode; but though he made every effort, so busy is life's whirl, and so changeful are summer friends, he found that the Wallaces had dropped out of people's minds.

At last he thought, in his perplexity, of Meta's old friend Agneau; and he had gone into the store to make inquiries, when Meta's entrance, and old Agneau's muttered mention of her name in his polite greeting, had suddenly found him what he sought.

Great was the surprise in Bond street when Meta announced the visitor. Never had guest more earnest welcome; even Florry sprang up to shake hands, and loudly expressed her joy, shocking Mr. Ascher beyond measure by the sight of her excessive frailness and the terrible change that was written on her face. A long, earnest, half-tearful, half-joyful interview was held in the little parlor; the widow recounting her trials to the sympathizing listener, and filling him with a generous desire to share with the family of his old benefactor the wealth that had crowned his efforts. Something of this he did urge; but Mrs. Wallace, in the midst of her grateful tears, refused to listen to such a proposal.

"Then let me carry out my original plan, and take Meta off your hands," he persisted; "she will be one less to provide for."

"Meta — take Meta!" cried Florry, hurriedly. "No, sir! she cannot be spared! She is all we have to rely on!"

"One less, Mr. Ascher?" smiled the mother. "'A house divided against itself,' you know! Don't ask me to give you my brave little woman just now!"

There was an infinite tenderness in her voice, that brought a sweet reward for Meta's patient continuance in well-doing. She had not dreamed how far her gentle, silent, Christian spirit had influenced them all, and the glad surprise was all too much for her composure.

"Are we to be deluged, incorrigible child?" asked Mr. Ascher, tenderly, as he took her hand. "Is that fountain inexhaustible? Come! We've had enough of weeping; beware, lest I join you myself! Will you board me, Miss Housekeeper?"

"I'll think about it," she said, smiling, "if you promise not to smoke in the parlor."

"Can't I have one pipe a day? Remember, I've been in the land of Oriental indulgence in the weed. One pipe? — is it a bargain?"

And so, with happy jest, in the midst of all this thankful, serious joy, the first day of happiness passed away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"META," said Mr. Ascher, suddenly, after a pause in one of their long talks, "Meta, what was done with your father's papers?"

"They were given into the executor's hands; Mr. Clay has charge of our affairs, you know. Why do you ask, Mr. Ascher?"

"Why, your father had in his possession a note of mine, which has never been redeemed. There was an understanding between us on the subject, and that is the reason I gave myself no concern until I discovered the extent of your losses. Surely, if Mr. Clay has possession of the note, he has been very negligent not to present the claim, especially when he knows your straits. What is the matter, child?"

"Did papa never write to you for another

note?" she asked, in a low voice; old events coming back in full force for the first time in years.

"Write for another? No! why should he have written?"

"Because" — after a slight pause — "because that paper was destroyed very long ago."

"Your father's careless handling, I suppose! Who destroyed it? and how did it happen that I never heard of the loss?"

"O Mr. Ascher! please don't laugh at me" — in a distressed voice — "but I chewed it up and swallowed it!"

"Chewed it up! swallowed it, eh! This is a pretty piece of business, indeed. Come, Meta! out with your story! How did it happen?"

In a mortified tone she related the circumstance so long forgotten, and sighed out, in conclusion:

"Papa promised me he would write to you for another —"

"But he never did, my dear, and you haven't a shadow of proof that I owe it; have you, now?"

"No, sir, I have not" — with a surprised look in his face.

The eyes, sparkling with mirth, turned away from her earnest, shocked glance, as he answered:

"Not a shadow of proof, my young financier. You have quietly eaten five thousand dollars, with twenty years' interest added — "

Meta groaned, despairingly.

"Now, that would be very funny, if you had it to spare; but as Florry is sick and your mother quite poor, I call that an extravagant, indigestible meal! Come! What do you say?"

"I call — you — a cruel, cruel friend," she cried, sobbing.

"Another deluge? I'll have to go down town and buy me the biggest 'Noah's Ark' in the city! Hold up your head, and let me tell you what I shall have to do. Won't hold it up, eh? Obstinate little gourmand, little cannibal — "

Meta looked up, and saw a face absolutely sparkling with merriment. He looked at her, laughing heartily, and then continued:

"I am going to deposit that money to your credit, to-morrow, in the Bank of New York; every cent of it is yours, my little Meta."

"Mine? You mean mamma's, Mr. Ascher."

"No, I mean yours. Your father advanced me a loan of ten thousand dollars when I started business for myself in the West, which was to bear interest from the date of loan, and to be repaid at any time that suited me best. At the end of five years I offered to pay the whole

amount; but your father, who was always generous, discovered that should I do so my business would be greatly hampered, and we then compromised by the payment of half, and by making a new note, payable on demand, for the balance. He was anxious to give me the sum, from a kind recklessness in money affairs and a sincere interest in my success; but this I of course refused. After considerable parley, your father laughingly proposed that *you* — who were then an infant, whom I had just been fondling and playing with — should be heiress of the amount; and he made out, on the spur of the moment, the new bond. 'If, in the strange transitions of life, my future fails,' he said, lightly, 'let my little daughter there take the money; if I outlive you, why, it stands as it is.'"

"Oh!" cried Meta, drawing a long breath.

"You may well say, 'Oh!' Suppose I *had* died, and all I have had gone to my distant kith and kin, and that Florry had languished and your mother suffered because you possessed an unheard-of appetite for negotiable notes."

"I think you are laughing at me, Mr. Ascher."

"Or suppose I was not an honest man."

"I cannot suppose *that*, you know."

"Well! suppose you come over here, and let me look in your eyes while I tell you a story."

"I can do that, easily," she said, rising, with a smile.

"Meta, do you think I owe you nothing beside that debt?"

"Nothing, sir, but friendship! What else?"

"Child, do you know what I have found in my wanderings these weary years? I have found that God whom I did not seek in the days of my youth. Do you remember a timid little voice whispering, 'Mr. Ascher, won't you try to love God, just a little?' I *have* been trying ever since, dear Meta; and, thanks be to God, I have gotten me the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Meta could not answer, for her joy was great; but she timidly laid her soft hand on the gray hairs, and prayed in her heart of hearts that God might bless the good man, whose friendship was such a privilege and a blessing to her life.

"And how was *your* promise kept, my little one? Is the ring still worn?"

Meta held out her hand, and pointed lovingly to the plain circlet.

"So, you have not failed me, child! God *has* watched between me and thee, and has blessed our friendship through distance and time. We are treading the same path in our pilgrimage — 'the ways, they are many, the end, it is one!'

You in your sweet, youthful freshness, and I in my gray hairs, from out the 'kingdoms of the world,' have still the same ambition — to run with patience the race that is set before us, striving to obtain the prize."

"So, it seems you're an heiress, in a weak way, Miss Sobersides," said Edward, good-humoredly, when Mr. Ascher had succeeded in convincing the assembled family that he really owed Meta a considerable sum, and was not using this as an excuse for assisting them. "Well, little sis, don't put on airs because your estates in the moon have turned out so well. Come! won't you help a fellow pay his club fee?"

"I shall turn my fortune over to mamma, of course," said Meta, laughing, "and she can devise a punishment for my fortunate meal at Bellevue."

"O mamma and Meta!" cried Florry, clapping her hands, "let us go away where I can hear the birds sing and see the flowers! We have money, now, to take us, and I am so tired of my life between brick walls!"

"Hear the birds sing!" "See the flowers!" — was it possible Florry craved these things? Mrs. Wallace and Meta exchanged sorrowful glances.

"Please take me away," continued the sick girl, earnestly. "I shall never go out again, here. My dresses are all too large for me; I folded them in the big trunk, up-stairs, long ago. Meta, those pretty Valenciennes laces are there, too; you can have them, only you don't care about dress."

"Florry, what *can* you mean, darling?" cried Mrs. Wallace, soothingly. "Don't give away your laces."

"O mamma, mamma! are you blind? I have long seen how it would be, and felt sure of it in my heart. I shall never wear laces again. I can never go to balls and operas with Meta's money. My silks hang on me as if I were a skeleton, and Meta must wear them all!" Florry buried her face in her mother's lap, and sobbed bitterly.

"You will break my heart if you talk so, darling," said the mother, brokenly. "We will take you to some watering-place, if you desire the country—"

"Oh, no! I mean the real, quiet country, mamma; not one of those stifling, crowded places. I don't want gayety; I shall never dance again. I hate the very sight of my beautiful clothes and my little satin slippers. O Meta, darling, teach me how you learned to care

for other things than these, for there is nothing left me but to learn how to die!"

Meta took the hands, so piteously outstretched, and tried, through her tears, to soothe the wild outburst of grief and fear that followed Florry's speech. To deny the truth of what she had said would be cruel and useless. She could only lift her heart in silent prayer for grace to help and comfort the sorrowful soul that had come to a full knowledge of its fate.

"Do you remember," said her sister, after a pause — "do you remember the book we cried over last winter? I can never forget the awe that came over me as you read of that dead girl with 'worms busy at her fairness.' Can I ever think of that without shuddering, Meta? Oh, is my beauty fit only for this?"

Mrs. Wallace tried to put a stop to the scene, but Florry's agitation could not be suppressed. A violent coughing spell ensued, and the life-tide poured in a red stream from the pallid lips.

"Never mind," said Florry, faintly; "this is not the first time. Poor mamma!"

The tired eyelids closed wearily, and a fainting fit of alarming length terrified the little household into a sudden realization that the dark cloud, so long threatening, was nearer than they supposed.

Mrs. Wallace was overwhelmed at the magnitude and certainty of the sorrow awaiting her, as she sat all through that long night at her daughter's side. Wild, rebellious murmurs filled her heart; for Florry was her idol, her pride, her precious jewel above price. She had forgotten the injunction, or rather, it fell on deaf ears: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

For days Florence kept her bed, clinging with a childlike confidence to Meta, listening with eagerness to the low words of comfort and faith that came from the depths of a sorrowful yet thankful heart. All the old contempt was forgotten; Florry seemed to realize with desperate earnestness that she had no time to deal with life's trivialities, and her fretful, repining spirit was wonderfully subdued. A very babe in religion, she grasped at the mysterious truths of immortality with a feverish energy that proved how readily she appreciated the folly of all earthly creeds when the battle with life and death was in truth before her. The "new body" which had so seized on Meta's childish imagination made a deep impression upon her sister, who listened with dilating eyes to the exposition of that glorious future that awaited the mortal putting on immortality. Calling Meta to her

one night, as she was preparing to retire, Florry whispered, lovingly:

"You are a dear little comforter, God bless you! There! don't cry! you'll make me cough; and I feel better than I have done for days. Good-night, darling! Why, your cheek is all wet! Don't cry for me, Meta. You deserve to live, and I have frittered away all my time. There! I can't talk, now."

Meta went to her couch that night with a thankful heart. She was beginning to see "fields white unto the harvest," and could thank God for her sure belief in the promise, "In due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not."

As soon as Florry's strength rallied, after the hemorrhage, her longing for country sights and sounds was gratified. Mr. Ascher rented for Mrs. Wallace a pretty country residence, filled it with many little comforts beyond their means, and superintended the move from the city, which, by easy stages, was safely accomplished. With the strange variableness of her disease, Florry rallied wonderfully for awhile, taking so much interest in the birds and flowers provided by Mr. Ascher's thoughtfulness, and seeming so thoroughly to enjoy the sweet, pure atmosphere that filled her with renewed life, that Mrs. Wallace's fears subsided, and she allowed herself to

be deluded with false hopes; while the rest saw too well that the end was only postponed for a time, and the sentence as unchanging as the sun.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BRIDGET had overcome Meta's scruples in regard to paying her smaller wages than she had been receiving, and had left her good place in the city, in order to assist her young mistress in the trying times her watchful love had foreseen for the future. Mrs. Wallace very gladly accepted her services, and, leaving all household arrangements to Meta, never knew of the sacrifice the good Irishwoman had made to accompany them to Rose Cottage, in Westchester. Florry took a wonderful fancy to Bridget's ministering. No one knew better how to shake up and smooth the snowy pillows, or to lift the weak frame from sofa to bed; and the invalid fancied that no buttered toast or poached egg compared with those compounded in "real Irish style, honey," as

Bridget invariably informed her. The relief to Meta was intense when her faithful nurse took, by degrees, the heavy responsibility of housekeeping off her young shoulders, leaving her time to devote to reading and talking to Florry.

The invalid's room was the family resort. There Mr. Ascher, when he came up from the city every night, brought his cheerful face and merry talk to cheer the languid girl, telling her all the bright, interesting incidents of his day, laying his nightly tribute of choice flowers and fruits on her little table, and being so considerate and loving that his presence became necessary to her comfort.

Monsieur Jean, too, took great interest in his friends, and would spend his Saturday's leisure at the cottage; amusing Florry with his queer kindliness, always bringing a goodly supply of *bon-bons*, and affording her many hours of exquisite pleasure by drawing forth sweet sounds from Meta's piano. Beethoven's inspired harmonies were Florry's chief joy at twilight, and the old professor, delighted to find his favorite so reverenced, would sit at the piano in the dim light, reveling in the magnificent Septuor, or the sweet minor strains of some of the symphonies, till the very air seemed purified and impregnated with the melody.

Edward, still out of employment, had taken a wonderful fancy for farming, entirely on a theoretic plan of his own, and turned the few acres belonging to the cottage into his field of operations. He had persuaded himself that this was his long undiscovered "forte," and that he was destined to reveal the wonders of untried genius to an admiring world.

"You shall wear your silks and diamonds yet, my beautiful Flora!" he said, confidently, to his sister, one day, after unfolding some wonderful scheme for benefiting agricultural science. "We will see you as regal as ever before the world, my queen!"

Florence shook her head sadly as Meta signed to Edward to stop.

"Speak to him, Meta," she said, wearily; "tell him I can never wear gems again. He doesn't understand that my place is under the flowers — so soon — so soon, too!"

"Poor Flora!" cried Edward, stroking her hair a moment, and then suddenly leaving the room.

"O Meta, Meta," sobbed Florence on her sister's shoulder, "don't let him talk to me so again! Don't let me ever begin to think of the possibility of going out again! It can never, never be."

"Do you think, Bridget, that any one ever wanted to die?" asked Florry, one evening, of her kind attendant, when the rest were at tea. "Do you believe I will really long to go, as Johnny did?"

"Maybe not — maybe not, deary; it's not I as can say that! Your cough is bad and your frame is weak, but you haven't like the same pains with my boy, and the blessed rest doesn't seem as wishful to ye, perhaps; but you're not for living always so helpless and suffering, my poor lamb?"

"Oh, no," answered Florry, calmly; "I know I can never be strong again, and I feel no desire to live, now. But I was afraid I ought to want to die ever so much, you know, Bridget, and I am not good enough for that, yet — "

"God gives us that strength, sure, when it's needed," interrupted Bridget, eagerly; "don't go for worrying yourself with the like. He promises to make all our bed in our sickness —"

"Yes, I know; it wasn't that," said Florry, a new light stealing into the beautiful dark eyes. "I know I am not afraid any more, because Meta has made me see that I shall surely be sustained, and when He bids me go through the deep waters, His love will keep me from dread

and danger! Only, Bridget, I know mamma will grieve so bitterly, and she is so blind to it all. She thinks that my improvement here is so encouraging, and cannot believe — what I feel so sure of — that it is only the dying flutter of the candle, so soon to go out in darkness. This is what perplexes me, and makes me wonder if I can ever really desire to give her so much sorrow and suffering."

"Nay, poor lamb, it's not in your own hands," said Bridget, wiping her eyes; "the blow comes from far above us, and she must e'en bear it. I trust her eyes will be opened, my darlint, to many a beautiful thing. Sure, it'll be hard for her to keep her thoughts away from heaven, an' *ye* there, her jewel, her treasure."

"Oh, I trust so," sighed the sick girl. "It would be a great grief to me to feel that poor mamma will always live the old life; and if my going will help her, as God in his mercy has helped me to see the nothingness and vanity of my years wasted, I would not feel a pang in parting, for I know that it is not forever."

One evening in early spring, a party gathered in the sick-room for the last time. Softly and tenderly Death laid his hand on the snowy forehead, and was stealing the light from the beau-

tiful eyes. Florence was spared the suffering and pain, at the last, of most consumptives, and, though the paroxysms of coughing were distressing to the sorrowing group gathered around her couch, they seemed scarcely to affect the tranquil, peaceful expression on her lovely face. She was going forth on the dark journey, safe with that "rod and staff" she had grasped in undoubting faith.

"Christ *my* righteousness," she murmured, fixing her fading eyes on her mother's face. "O mamma — Edward — believe!"

That was all for a long time, as the watchers wept and prayed. She was so still, the faint breath scarcely stirring the linen on her breast, that Mrs. Wallace, with a cry of agony, bent her ear to the parted lips.

"He giveth the victory," came tremblingly, feebly to the mother's ear; "mamma, do not reject —" Then, as if new strength had come to the parting spirit, the voice grew clearer and triumphant as she cried, "'O Death, where is thy sting?'" and, drooping her head on Meta's shoulder, like a tired child, sank to rest. A feeble flutter of breath — a pressure of the hand — and the long lashes shut out the light of those beautiful eyes forever.

Days of wretchedness to the bereaved mother

followed on Florry's death. Locking herself away from all sympathy, refusing even necessary food, she met the greatest shock of her life with no solace beyond the world; and what was the world to her now? In Florry had been centered all her ambitious hopes. She had never allowed herself to believe that her beautiful child must surely die, and the obstinate eyes refused to see, until Death had entered the household and covered her idol with the shadow of his wing.

For though we dare to dream, in human pride,
Our idols from His knowledge we can hide,
He will not of his worship be denied.

Though for a time He grants our mad desire
To live 'mid human joys, nor seek the higher,
The purging comes at last — and comes by fire.

Cherish thy earthly ties — yea, guard them well —
But leave thy Maker, still, a place to dwell
Unsullied and unshared by earthly spell.

Else blessing in thy love thou seek'st in vain;
He will not leave thy heart unpurged with pain;
Erect no idol where thy God should reign.

Bridget's loving sympathy and Mr. Ascher's tender watchfulness were Meta's comfort when Mrs. Wallace, shutting herself away to her sorrow, as "one without hope," left to her young daughter all the sad care of the beloved dead.

But that inner strength that made her, though "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing," the mercy in which she had trusted supplied in her time of trial. Florence's peaceful death, giving sure hope of a blessed future, was surely too great a source of thankfulness for her not to bear the bitter sting with patience. The wonderful change in her gay, thoughtless nature, and the happy faith so graciously vouchsafed when at first it seemed so impossible to impress the self-indulgent spirit, filled Meta's heart with gratitude unspeakable for the first-fruits of her sowing of precious seed.

Edward was greatly affected by his sister's death. Coming to Meta, several weeks after the event, he said, pointing upward, as he always did when speaking of the dead:

"Sis, what did she mean? I've just been putting some of her favorite daisies on her grave, and I suddenly remembered what she had said that dreadful night. You understand?"

"Yes," replied Meta, gravely; "but, dear Edward, I hoped you had not forgotten so soon—"

"Don't preach," interrupted her brother, impatiently; "I don't pretend to be a saint yet. Just tell me up and down what Florry meant by telling me to believe; for, if I can do as she wanted me to, why, I will—that's all! I tell

you what, old lady, I never could listen to your sobersided lectures; but Florry's a different person. If *she* could find it so easy to die — my poor little beauty! — why, I'd like to know how to carry out her wishes. Bless her sweet face! how I loved that little sister! I don't believe I care much whether I succeed or not, now."

Edward's eyes glistened as he abruptly turned away, too full of grief to say more.

Meta did not neglect to work upon the first faint desires to follow Florry's advice that had sprung up in her brother's heart, but, as one touching on hallowed ground, undertook the new mission humbly. Oh, if she might be permitted to "strengthen the brethren!" She was finding work enough for the willing heart as she toiled in the Master's vineyard, nothing doubting that the harvest was in store.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FIVE years of varied experience, of sunshine and shadow, sickness and health, sorrow and joy, have passed over Meta's sunny head, but the trusting, earnest, faithful heart is unchanged. The child has developed into the thoughtful Christian woman; but time has not marred the beautiful promise of youth, nor the world stifled the noble aspirations and firm-rooted principles of faith. There is no influence more silently exerted or more potent than that of Christian example — unanswerably proving the weakness of the scoffer's creed, and exhibiting the precious ornament of a "meek and quiet spirit," against all the contradictions and disappointments of life, which in itself proves the strength of that Power that sustains and guides.

In the pretty sunshiny parlor at Rose Cottage, surrounded by comforts and refinements almost equal to the old life, Mrs. Wallace sits in her easy-chair, with an open volume in her lap. But her eyes have wandered from the page before her, out from the lace-draped windows, across the bright flowers and waving trees of their pretty garden, to a spot far off in the corner of the little iron-railed plot where her darling sleeps — the spot that holds at once her greatest earthly grief and most blessed joy — where her thoughts are always wandering so yearningly, while her hands take up the daily tasks they have found to do. Years have wrought a merciful change in the haughty spirit, and Florry's early death was not in vain. The faith that lighted up those dying eyes, and changed the nervous, frightened invalid, shuddering at thought of death and the worms, to the triumphant, hopeful Christian, has never been forgotten, nor failed to awaken a longing after things unseen, which are eternal. God sends his Holy Spirit to create and to help these feebly-shooting seeds of Christian faith, and never leaves the earnest desire to die out, unaided, in its search after light. He who will "neither break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax" requires nothing impossible of his

children; and if we grieve when he takes from us our dearest joys, he does not leave us comfortless, but makes of our sorrow a source of spiritual good, and brings forth from the depths of humiliation the brightest fruits of righteousness and peace.

The short summer afternoon was almost over, and Florry's grave in the garden was losing itself in shadows, when Mrs. Wallace, turning sadly from the window, felt a tender hand on her own. Starting at the sudden interruption to her reverie, she made an exclamation of surprise.

"It's only I, mamma," cried Meta, laughing; "have I frightened you? Mr. Ascher insisted I should run ahead of him to announce his arrival, and, seeing you alone, I stole in as noiselessly as possible."

"Mr. Ascher here?" said her mother, hurriedly rising. "Pray let me go to him at once. Where is he, Meta?"

"Out in the garden — with — guess whom, mamma!" — slowly and mischievously.

"Monsieur Jean, I suppose. I'm not good at guessing, you know, dear."

"Monsieur Jean, mamma! Why, he sailed for France a month ago! No, indeed! it is my dear Winny Clifton; and Mr. Ascher has brought her here to give me a charming sur-

prise. O mamma! he has bought Bellevue; and there is something very mysterious about it; and there's to be an infant department — I don't know exactly what!"

"'Bought Bellevue!' — 'infant department!' Why, Meta! you are losing your wits."

"Not a bit of it, mamma! But come out to Winny, please. She is waiting in the carriage; and when we have welcomed her among us, Mr. Ascher will tell you the wonderful plan he has so slyly conceived in his dear old head."

Mrs. Wallace, quite as curious as Meta, followed her out to the carriage, giving Miss Clifton a warm welcome, though she had appeared so unexpectedly among them.

"I fear you will think me very unceremonious," smiled Winny, half apologizing; "but Mr. Ascher would not listen to reason, and I was obliged to appear unannounced."

Mr. Ascher smiled too, as he assisted the invalid to her inseparable companion, the wheeled chair; but he positively refused to be questioned, until the smoke of his favorite pipe inspired him to eloquence.

"Don't think I am going to beg you to tell," said Meta, pouting; "you are a naughty old gentleman, and when the spirit of contradiction is roused, I have nothing to do with you!"

"I wouldn't curb such independence," said Mr. Ascher, rubbing his hands, and laughing; "it would be a pity to disturb such unfeminine self-possession. I don't believe you have your share of curiosity. But never mind! I am not going to tease, to-night. Just run off and make me one of your famous cups of tea, and give me a nice little supper, and I'll promise you a whole evening's good behavior to pay for it."

And when Winny was made thoroughly comfortable, and had partaken of Meta's abundant refreshment, Mr. Ascher consented to light his pipe and unfold the mystery, which had puzzled his young friend all through the supper, notwithstanding her determination not to appear interested in anything beyond the praise lavished upon her success as a housekeeper.

Mrs. Wallace was overcome with surprise and emotion when she learned the extent of Mr. Ascher's generous designs, and Meta could scarcely believe it possible that she was really mistress of Bellevue; the beautiful home that had been the birthplace and the grave of so many generations of Wallaces, until it had passed out of their possession with the rest of their wealth, never, as they thought, to be recovered.

Mr. Ascher had purchased the estate with some difficulty, as its present owner could not

be induced, except by the offer of an almost fabulous sum, to sell the property at all; but perseverance and a high price had finally overcome, and Bellevue passed into Mr. Ascher's hands. He had settled the valuable property upon Meta as soon as the sale was concluded, reserving only a small portion of the tract as a building site, in order to carry out his long-cherished design of founding an orphan school. As soon as possible after obtaining possession of the estate, he had built and thoroughly fitted up a large, handsome house for his orphans; and, finding the Bellevue house and furniture unchanged, save for the wear and tear of time, had made no additions or alterations, that his friends might have the greater pleasure in returning to their old home.

When his design appeared likely to be carried out, Mr. Ascher had written to Miss Clifton, from a generous desire of providing a pleasant and lucrative employment for his favorite's old friend, and after unfolding his plans, and assuring her that her assistance would be invaluable, had induced her to accept the position of matron. Winny was overjoyed at the prospect of such a home, and a life of real usefulness among the little ones whom Mr. Ascher's benevolence had rescued from want and sin; and the

idea of being permanently settled near Meta added no little to her delight in furthering the good man's charitable designs.

Mrs. Wallace could not restrain her tears as Mr. Ascher so naturally, and as if it were all a matter of course, revealed how entirely his thoughts and time had been devoted to Meta's interests; but at first she refused to listen to such munificent kindness.

"My dear madam," pleaded Mr. Ascher, "I am only anticipating. Meta can't get out of her heirship unless you'd have me look up a fifty-ninth cousin somewhere in China. I have made, and shall not unmake, my will; and, whether she like it or no, this young lady, being 'sole daughter of my heart,' is possessor, after me, of all I have. Bellevue is only a slice of my pie —"

"If there were no other reason," interrupted Mrs. Wallace, quickly, "I could not willingly expose my darling to the temptations of such a lot, my kind friend. Indeed, you can never understand the snares we women encounter in a life of luxury, or how difficult it is to keep one's self unspotted from the world, when that world is bowing at our feet. Nay, Mr. Ascher! I can never express my gratitude for your exceeding kindness; but let Meta live away from the dazzling allurements that would assail her, and

do not lay snares for her feet. She is better in her present position. Surely, no one could be happier than my sweet-voiced bird, with only the plain little nest to shelter her; but let us once appear in the world that has forgotten us, and who could interpose to save our innocent Meta from life's temptations, its bewildering glamour—"

"She is in a mighty hand, dear friend," interrupted Mr. Ascher, solemnly; "and He in whom is all her trust will give her the victory in the path he ordains. I admit that wealth brings great responsibilities, but I deny that because of this we cannot keep our lamps burning and our hearts pure. The field is larger, the opportunities of doing good almost unbounded, and, if we dispense the riches God vouchsafes us for the benefit of his own suffering ones, the peace and blessing of labor well done comes as sweet as though the widow had dropped her mite into the treasury. Christian use of wealth has accomplished so many of the inestimable blessings of the world, that we should not shrink from the stewardship if it is given us. But it is useless to argue! Let me only say that my orphan school and its support, together with sundry other vagaries, if you will, have already absorbed a goodly portion of my means, and Meta

will not be cumbered with vast estates. Not enough, I warrant you, my lady," turning to the thoughtful face, raised so earnestly to his own —"not enough to give you many such meals as you indulged in when my note happened to be conveniently near. By the way, I hardly think my orphans will be quite safe in your vicinity, Meta. Suppose you took a fancy to swallow the whole set, Miss Clifton into the bargain?"

"Am I never to have any peace?" pouted Meta, kissing his hand, that lay with all its wrinkles and sunburn on her own fair, dainty palm. "Don't be afraid for your orphans! Dear little creatures! how nice it will be to play with them and show them the delights of the dear Bellevue woods. I quite dote on babies!"

"Babies in linen cambric and ruffles, warranted not to cry, *possibly*, though I doubt even that. I am skeptical of the fact, but we will let it pass. But what say you to very dirty faces, and obstinate little wills to conquer, and manners something entirely original and outside the civilized code? I have picked up my poor little ones in the alleys and by-ways, and we have not begun the good work yet. Will you be discouraged with my *protégés*, think you?"

"You know that I will not! I believe you

are teasing me, as usual; and I leave you the field, unfought! Only, pray reserve the baby department for me."

Mr. Ascher made some jesting remark, and then renewed his discussion with Mrs. Wallace, succeeding, after much argument, in gaining his point.

"It wouldn't do to lose my lawyer's fee," he said, with mock seriousness; "so Meta must take Bellevue, since I have waived all right and title to the place, and have honestly paid for the deed. And now, when can we move, bag and baggage?"

"It will be hard to leave the cottage," sighed Mrs. Wallace, her eyes filling with tears. "Everything that I have learned of life's earnestness and blessedness has come to me here; and it is hard, too, to leave my darling's grave to strangers. Think of careless hands and ruthless footsteps at work where all is so sacred to me!"

Gently and kindly Mr. Ascher touched upon the sore wound in the mother's heart, as he told of the plain marble column, engraven with Florry's name, which his ever-kind thoughtfulness had provided, and which only awaited the removal of the young girl's remains to take its place among the rest of her race, who slumbered in everlasting silence near the beautiful Hudson.

At this touching evidence of the old man's faithful friendship, Mrs. Wallace, subdued to tears, made no further resistance, but joyfully and gratefully allowed him to have his way, listening with interest to his charitable plans for the welfare of the children he had saved from poverty and suffering, and thanking God from her heart for the blessing left her in so good and true a friend.

Before the summer was over, the threshold of Bellevue was crossed, and the mother and daughter, with their faithful Bridget, comfortably settled under the old roof-tree.

"Times is changed, my darlint," sighed the old nurse, as they sat before the nursery fire, for the sake of "lang syne," on the first evening of their arrival, Mrs. Wallace having retired to her chamber to indulge the sadness she could not resist, in coming back to these familiar scenes. "Times is changed," sighed Bridget, "but it seems, Meta, as we've much to be thankful for, after all! Johnny and Florry is only become treasure in heaven, like, and your mamma so changed, and we safe in the old place. God be praised for his mercies!"

"Yes, it really seems that all things work together for good, dear Bridget. Even when we

cannot see a step before us, we know that He with whom there is no night is guiding us aright, and only bids us trust Him for a little time. When Florry was so ill, so evidently fading away, and yet seemed so unconscious and thoughtless of the future awaiting her, I sometimes felt discouraged; for it seemed the little I could do was so *little* — "

"Ay, there's our fault, Meta! We too often sneers and fights shy of the little things, thinking ourselves mighty enough to do something for the world to see. That's our trouble! We looks for harvest, sure, before we've worked the seed; and, if people don't turn around to praise the task, we gets mighty tired of the heat and rain and then the drought. We never stops to think that the little seed of corn makes a great stalk and a full ear if we only gives it time. So, be not discouraged with the little things, darlint; they grow into big things by-and-by!"

"Yes," said Meta, gazing wistfully into the bright blaze on the hearthstone, which Bridget had kindled "for cheer's sake;" "yes, we have much to thank God for in all these years. Mamma is so changed, and Florry safe in heaven, and dear Mr. Ascher and Winny living at our very door, and *you* back in the nursery. Oh, dear old Bridget! how good you've been!"

Here Meta, not having outgrown, yet, her fondness for suffocating caresses, gave the old nurse an affectionate hug.

"Even Edward seems to have changed since Florry's death," she continued, musingly, when Bridget had cried out for mercy; "his last letter was full of love to mamma, and he spoke so longingly of home. Mr. Ascher thinks that his great success in agricultural invention will keep him steady, and I feel very sure that he is thinking seriously of life. Mamma was so gratified when he sent Mr. Ascher what he called the first-fruits of his labors for the orphan school. I never should have believed that Edward could take an interest in such things. Oh, I trust we will yet see him a Christian."

Bridget did not reply, and the two sank into a reverie which was not broken until the chiming of the nursery clock reminded them that the night was far spent. And, truly, in Meta's fair, sunny life, "the morning was at hand."

We leave her striving to run with patience the race set before her, looking unto Christ. If her example shall have encouraged one youthful heart to do and to bear little things, believing that in God's own time they grow in stature and in strength, bringing a mighty harvest from the tiny seed, we shall not have written in vain. If

it seems hard, when "the outward man perish," to trust the mercy by which "the inward man is renewed day by day," let us not be faithless but believing, crying to our faint hearts and shrinking spirits: "Why art thou cast down, oh my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?"

"Hope thou in God! for I will yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

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